This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

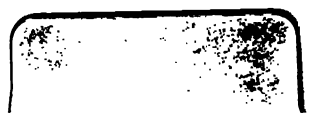
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

600067234S



FIGHTING THE AIR.

VOL. II.

FIGHTING THE AIR.

A Novel.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF

'LOVE'S CONFLICT,' 'VÉRONIQUE,' ETC. ETC.

'Give me something to meet and to fight;
I faint with fighting these things of air.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1875.

[*All Rights reserved.*]

251. b. 87.

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	A MIDNIGHT ALARM	1
II.	ON THE OPEN SEA	14
III.	THE MISSING BOAT	27
IV.	A WELCOME TELEGRAM	40
V.	THE END OF HOPE	55
VI.	THE SHADOW OF DEATH	68
VII.	MARGARITA SAVES LAURENCE FANE ..	82
VIII.	GEORGE IS DISAPPOINTED	96
IX.	HE TRIES TO CONSOLE HIMSELF ..	115
X.	WHAT IT LEADS TO	124
XI.	SIX YEARS AFTER	142
XII.	THE DINNER PARTY	151
XIII.	MISS FOLKES' CASE	169
XIV.	THE LUNATIC ASYLUM	179

CHAP.		PAGE
XV.	A VISION FROM THE DEAD	192
XVI.	LAURENCE FANE DOES NOT RETURN HOME	207
XVII.	MEG BRANDRIP	222
XVIII.	THE SAILOR'S TESTIMONY	236
XIX.	HOME WITH THE NEWS	252

FIGHTING THE AIR.

CHAPTER I.

A MIDNIGHT ALARM.

SOME few of the emigrants may have crept down to the miserable sleeping places provided for them, but the majority still lay huddled together about the forecastle and the lower deck.

Fane went up on the poop to get out of their way, and there fell into a mood that, compared to his former one, was almost despondent. His wife's attack had not alarmed, but it had much disturbed him. What could be the reason she had taken this sudden aversion to, and terror of, the sea? She had been so bright and hopeful until now, so

much more so than he had ever expected her to be, that this unaccountable change puzzled him. He thought how unfortunate it would be if she was unable to shake it off, and the few months' voyage became, in consequence, a misery to her instead of a pleasure. He speculated on this thing and on that, until he tired himself out, and sat down, without intending to do more than sit down, on a sail that lay near the vessel's mast. But Laurence Fane had passed through a great deal of fatigue and excitement that day, and was wearier than he imagined. He had not comfortably ensconced himself on the sail for long, watching the stars through the wreath of smoke which his cigar sent up like incense towards them, and thinking with much chagrin of the wretched human emigrant whose folly had caused so unadventitious a commencement to their journey, when his eyes insensibly closed upon all outward things, and he fell fast asleep.

* * * * *

'Fire! Fire! Fire!'

The cry rang out like an agonized appeal to heaven, and was followed by much shouting, trampling of feet, rattle of chains, and hurrying from every part of the vessel.

'Out of the way there,' cried a sailor, as he unceremoniously pulled the sail-cloth from under our hero's prostrate figure.

Fane was on his feet in a moment. He was about to expostulate, to ask the reason of his sudden ejection, or perhaps to swear a little at the intruder, when his ear caught the sound that rose up like a simultaneous shout from below.

'Good God!' he exclaimed, 'what is the matter?'

'Matter enough,' said the sailor roughly, 'as you may see without asking'—and he hurried away with the sail-cloth under his arm. Fane was bewildered. For the first moment he could understand nothing. Cries were ascending on every side; figures rushed past him in the dark-

ness—orders were being bawled out through a speaking trumpet—still no one stopped to tell him whence the confusion arose. Then the voices rang out again in unison from the lower deck; and their cry was—

'Fire! Fire! Fire!'

He understood it all now. The ship was in danger—their lives were at stake—their lives, the lives of Margarita and his child!

It did not need the strong breeze that was blowing athwart the vessel to clear his faculties now. With one bound he was down the companion-ladder, and mingling with the frightened crowd upon the quarter-deck. There were the whole crew hard at work, baling water into the hold, from which a dense column of smoke arising prevented anything beyond it being visible, whilst the unfortunate emigrants, driven hither and thither, knocked down and trampled over, found no rest for the soles of their feet, but swarmed over the whole vessel, and yet were always in the

way. What with the hustling of the crowd, the activity of the sailors, and the bawling of the captain, Fane found it difficult enough to gain any reliable information, for directly he seized hold of a man, he was either parted from him by the crowd, or duty forbade him to stop long enough to answer his questions. But at last he found himself, shoulder to shoulder, with one of the stewards.

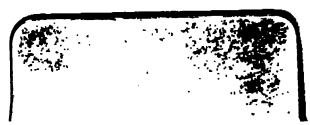
'What is all this about, steward?' he said hurriedly. 'Is there any danger?'

'Quite impossible to say, sir. The men can't get down into the hold where the fire broke out, to see how far it extends. Take care, sir! Stand more that way, or you'll be knocked overboard.'

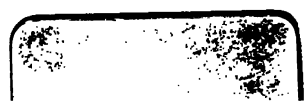
As he obeyed the friendly injunction, Laurence found himself clutched by the wrinkled fingers of a dirty old woman.

'Oh, do ye happen to know what's become of Jane Ellis?' she cried. 'For the love of the Lord, sir, tell me if the gal's on board ship or no.'

600067234S



600067234S



FIGHTING THE AIR.

VOL. II.

FIGHTING THE AIR.

A Novel.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF

'LOVE'S CONFLICT,' 'VÉRONIQUE,' ETC. ETC.

'Give me something to meet and to fight;
I faint with fighting these things of air.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1875.

[*All Rights reserved.*]

251. l. 874.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE OPEN SEA.

THE cold grey light of the January morning had begun to make itself visible before our hero recovered consciousness. He came to himself as a man who has lain down in the full vigour of life to have some fearful operation performed under the influence of chloroform comes to himself—with a vague knowledge of having undergone some great calamity that has left him maimed and helpless. He awoke, sick, trembling, and confused; and lay still for a few moments, powerless to remember where he was. A bleak wind was blowing across the Channel on his saturated garments, and making him feel icy cold; he turned on his side, touching his clothes with a

strange wonder, as he questioned himself why it should be so. This movement brought him in contact with the skirt of a soiled and draggled gown, from which he recoiled with distaste, and the effort roused his senses. He began to hear a few fragments of talk, mingled with the lamentations of women and a child's wailing. Remembrance came back to him; he started up with the cry of 'Margarita!'

'Hollo, mate! You've come round at last, have you?' said a voice, not unkindly, by his side.

Laurence Fane stared from right to left. He was in a boat crammed as full as it could hold of men, women, and children, tossing about in the middle of the Channel, and making but small way against a chopping wind, dead against her, at five o'clock in the morning.

'How did I come here?' he inquired wildly. 'The other boats, where are they?'

'Safe enough, you may be sure,' replied the

man who had spoken to him before. 'There's one'—pointing to leeward—'in sight of us, and the others have run on shore before now, likely enough. It's a nasty morning to be out in an open boat, but you would have been colder still by this time if we hadn't picked you up.'

'Did you pick me up?' said Fane, vaguely.

'Ay, sure enough! You were knocked overboard when the mast went, I reckon, and it's a providence you floated our way, for we were the last boat to leave the vessel.'

'My wife, my child!' groaned Laurence.

'Left in the ship?' inquired his new friend.

'No, no. Thank God! but in these open boats before such a wind—what may not happen to them?'

'Don't you fear. They're safe enough, little doubt. It's the poor souls left on board we ought to think of.'

'What has become of the vessel, then?'

'Burned to the water's edge, and with as good a skipper in her as ever walked planks,' replied the man solemnly.

There was a pause in the little company after that, till the silence was broken by a woman's voice.

'And poor Jane Ellis, too, she's gone to the bottom with the rest of 'em, if ever a body did. And I promised John Green on his dying-bed that I'd look after his gal, and his curse will follow me to mine for never giving a thought to her from that day to this.'

Laurence Fane turned towards the speaker.

It was the old crone who had clutched his arm in the terrible confusion that preceded the calamity, the details of which were only just coming back clearly to his mind.

How her presence recalled the sudden shock—the fear—and now the sickening uncertainty. He sprang to his feet with all a man's desire to drown the terrors of suspense in action.

'Is there nothing for me to do?' he exclaimed, loudly. 'Cannot I take the oars for some of you?'

'You'll find it hard work against this sea,' said the sailor nearest to him, 'and in your state, too. You'd much best lie quiet.'

'I can't lie quiet. I am all right again now. Give me an oar, for God's sake, and let us talk, or I shall go mad.'

But he had calculated beyond his strength. Before he had pulled two strokes the heavy oar fell from his nerveless hand.

'I am weaker than a woman,' he said despairingly.

'Hold up,' quoth the other. 'There's more than enough of us to do the work, and we're not so far from Deal now.'

'When shall we reach land?'

'Before night, any way, if the wind don't take to shifting. We've had the devil's own luck so far.'

'Ay! with not a morsel to eat nor a drop to drink!' said a grumbling voice from the bottom of the boat.

'And only the rags we were sleeping in to cover us,' cried another.

'And wid no knowledge if me poor husband is saved or drownded intirely. The Blessed Virgin make his bed the night,' chimed in an Irishwoman, who had two poor little children clinging to her and shivering with the cold.

'Now I call that downright ungrateful of the lot of you,' replied an old sailor. 'Here, whilst hundreds have perished in that there poor doomed vessel, we've got straight off with our lives and a good boat under us, and yet you're all ready to curse the Almighty because you haven't got a hot dinner served for you in the middle of the ocean. I call it a tempting of Providence.'

'Come, Parsons! they didn't mean it,' said another good-naturedly, as he took off his own jacket to put round the shoulders of a poor girl

more dead than alive with the cold. 'They'll all be thanking the Lord on their bended knees to-night for their safety, I warrant.'

'And what'll be the use of safety to me,' continued the Irishwoman, 'if me poor husband is lying at the bottom of the say? And all the bits of things gone down with the poor ship. Ochone! Ochone!'

Fane heard her and shuddered. What would be the use of life—of safety—to him if his treasures were not rescued from the waves as well?

He dared not think of it. The doubt, the suspense, were such awful agony, he could only wish, if they were not soon ended, that he had never recovered his consciousness.

The day wore on. The solitary boat which had accompanied them so far, and which every eye had been strained at in vain hope of recognizing her crew, was lost to sight again, and they seemed left alone on the wide ocean. In the distant

horizon the cliffs of Deal were visible, but the sea was contrary, and they had a heavy load and made very little progress against the waves. The cold was piercing, the children had cried themselves to sleep, the women slept with them, or lay silent and despairing at the bottom of the boat, whilst such of the men as could row relieved each other at the oars. As soon as Fane could shake off the weakness which had succeeded his partial drowning he worked incessantly. His mind was in a fever of anxiety, and he found no rest except in such over-exertion as threatened to leave disastrous effects as soon as it should be concluded; and in a fierce trampling down of pain that found vent in unnatural hilarity and recklessness of bearing.

'Be patient with the poor devils,' he said to a young fellow who was threatening to gag a woman if she didn't stop crying; 'they don't know when they are well off. They'll look back on it all as a pleasure party by-and-by. What time

did you say we should be in to-night, Jack?'

'Can't say for certain, sir,' replied the sailor, who had found out Fane's rank by this time, 'but if we don't run foul of a ship we ought to make Deal in another six or eight hours at this rate. Better let me take the oar, sir.'

'Not a bit of it, I'm as fresh as a daisy.'

But as he said the word inadvertently, a change came over his countenance, and he staggered backward on his seat.

'You're done up, sir; it's my time now,' cried the old sailor, seizing the oar from him. 'Now, my lads, all together.'

Fane chafed at his own weakness.

'It's that confounded knocking about I had under the vessel,' he said in a tone of vexation. 'It seems to have taken all the muscle out of me. I shall be another man when I've had something to eat. What a glass of grog you and I will have together in Deal, to-night, Jack.'

'Ay, ay! that's the way, sir; keep up your

spirits. Thank the Lord for His mercies, and think as little as one may of them that's gone.'

'Is there no hope, then, for those we left behind?'

'Precious little, I'm afraid, for if a ship came within hail of 'em, she'd be afraid to bear down on such a living mass. But all these things is managed for us, sir. Some must live and some die, or how would the world go on? All we can do is to be thankful for what we've got.'

'It's all very well to talk after that fashion,' crooned a quavering voice from the other end of the boat, 'but I'll never get the thoughts of Jane Ellis out of my head till my dying day. She was that sick, poor creature, that maybe she'd a never seen the end of the voyage, but she was a deal too good I warrant to be shrivelled up like a moth at a candle.' Fane started. He wondered if he was ever to hear the last of Jane Ellis.

'Well, I didn't mean to hurt you,' replied the sailor, 'but if the poor lass was sickly perhaps it

won't make so much difference to her, arter all. It's the young, and the blooming, and the healthy as have gone down in that ill-fated wessel as *I'd* cry over.'

'I suppose the boats are all sure to be in to-night,' said Fane, quickly.

'I hope so, sir, I'm sure, or the poor critters will fare badly. But the wind was dead agen them at first, and they're apt to get blown about a little. There's eight of them in all, and I shall be glad to see 'em counted over.'

'But there can be no real danger in such a sea as this,' cried Laurence Fane.

'Bless you, no, sir, but they aren't likely all to come in at the same time. It may be two or three days before they're collected together.'

'*Shall I live through them?*' he groaned inwardly, as the thought of the suspense before him passed through his unhappy mind.

But the excitement of their position, and the

necessity for immediate action, gave him strength to bear up for the present.

Three—four more hours of hunger and thirst —of cold—of alternate doubt and hope, passed away, and then they ran athwart the bows of a Dutch vessel bound for Deal, the commander of which, after much parleying and attempts at explanation between the English and foreign sailors, consented to take them on board — they were seventeen in all—and land them on the shores they had so lately quitted.

At ten o'clock that night the Dutch vessel anchored off Deal, and the greater part of the shipwrecked crew, Fane amongst the number, rushed on shore.

No tidings had been received of any of the other boats, and they were the first to announce the news of the burning of the 'Queen of the Wave.'

The oldest sailor left at once to report the calamity to the owners of the vessel, and Lau-

rence Fane was left in the strange town alone.

By the next morning another boat touched shore; and the safe arrival of two more was telegraphed from the coast of Wales.

But none of them was the long boat in which he had placed Margarita and her child.

He thought of lingering about Deal, but was assured that news would reach him sooner in London than any other place. Added to which it was unlikely that the missing boats would all make for the same port. Some, it was argued, might have been blown towards France, whilst others would be heard of at any place between Eddystone Lighthouse and the southern coast.

So Fane, unwillingly and despondingly, but yet borne up by an unnatural strength begotten of excitement and uncertainty, found his way back to London, and on the morning of the second day, haggard, disordered in appearance, and unshaved, staggered into Jack Reeves' apartments.

CHAPTER III.

THE MISSING BOAT.

JACK was in his dressing-gown and slippers, kneeling on his knees before the fire and toasting a sausage on a breakfast fork. He heard the door open without turning round.

'This is too bad, Mrs Adams!' he called out, supposing the intruder to be his landlady. 'Here's the third morning that daughter of yours has sent up my sausage half raw. I wish to goodness I had never given her that crown on Christmas day.' But the heavy step and the silence undeceived him; he looked up just as Fane sunk down exhausted into a chair.

'Laurence! old fellow! Why, where the dickens have you sprung from? Hasn't the ship

sailed? Didn't you go to Liverpool? Is Mrs ——? There's nothing the matter, is there?' he exclaimed, suddenly interrupting himself as he noticed his friend's general appearance of disorder.

'Matter, Jack? Only that I've lost everything—*everything!* That I am ruined—*alone!*'

'Not dead?' cried Jack.

'Oh, how I wish I knew—how I wish I knew,' said Fane, in a voice of despair, as tired out and broken down by the events of the last twenty-four hours, he laid his head down on the table and burst into tears.

Reeves was greatly shocked. He had never seen Fane in such a condition before, and he could not understand it, but as soon as the latter had recovered his voice he related to him all that had occurred.

'Of course it will come right,' said poor Laurence in conclusion, trying to cheat himself into believing what he so much desired, 'and you

mustn't think anything of my giving way as I did just now, Jack. It's from over-fatigue and fasting. The sailors say—and they are the best authorities, you know—there's not the slightest doubt but that all the boats will be in, in the course of a few hours, and I shall be telegraphed to, directly the long-boat makes her appearance, only it is rather trying to wait. It was so cold, too. I can't think how they'll get on. I dare say Margarita will stand it well enough, but I'm afraid it will fare badly with the poor little chap. He's only a couple of months old, you see.'

'Oh, I shouldn't worry about that,' replied Reeves, briskly, although he entertained from the beginning the most ghastly fears for the safety of the missing woman and child. 'Babies are such wonderful creatures, you know, they live through everything, and his mother is sure to keep him warm. Have some coffee, Fane. You look perishing with cold and

hunger. What have you eaten since coming on shore?'

'Very little. It was such a disappointment to find she had not arrived before me. But I will eat now, Jack, for I may receive a telegram from Deal any moment to summon me back again.'

'Of course! and all this travelling will knock you up without food. Have my sausage. It's beautifully brown now, and I'll have another cooked for myself in no time.'

But the attempt at eating was a failure. Laurence Fane swallowed a few mouthfuls and then abandoned his breakfast with a sigh.

'Don't be vexed with me, Jack, but to tell truth I'm too much excited to eat. I do so long to see my dear girl again. I am afraid she will have suffered so much suspense during our separation. And you know what it is, Jack. When you're expecting a thing and it's coming very near—a meeting with any one you

love, for instance — you can't eat, you can't eat.'

He pushed his plate away from him as he spoke, and sat for a moment in deep thought.

'I told old Parsons—that's the sailor who took the command of our boat,' he said presently, straightening himself as by a great effort, and trying to speak unconcernedly, 'that he would find me here when he has any intelligence for me. He came up to town yesterday to report the accident to the ship's agents, and he said he should remain here, as the arrival of the boats is sure to be telegraphed to the agents first of all. So, if Parsons should come whilst I'm out, Reeves, you'll know what to say to him, won't you?'

'Where are you going to, Fane? You're not fit to go out.'

'I'm just going round to the agents to let them know my whereabouts, that's all! Where do you think I had better take my Margarita on arrival?'

'Home to her father. Have you let them know yet?'

'No, where's the use? They're simple people, you see, and they'd fret themselves to death, fancying all kinds of horrors. I shall wait till she joins me, and let them have the whole of our adventures together. Will that not be the best?'

'Well, I don't know,' replied Jack dubiously, 'perhaps it would. I think I should write to the brother, though.'

'The very one I don't want. George is all very well, but he is too boisterously funny at times. I would rather wait till my wife has arrived.'

'All right, old fellow; do as you wish. Shall I accompany you to the ship's agent?'

'No, thank you! I would rather go alone.'

He wandered away listlessly, but returned almost radiant.

'Two more boats in,' he said gleefully, 'and their crews safe. One came on shore at Lyme-

Regis, in Devon, you know, and the other at Newhaven. Curious how these little barks get buffeted about and driven out of their course, isn't it? There are only two more now to be accounted for, and Parsons (whom I met at the agents') says they're pretty sure to arrive to-night. Indeed the Newhaven boat says she came in alongside of one of them till within a few miles of shore.'

'Which one?'

'They hadn't said, but Parsons thinks it must have been the long-boat, because they put off about the same time. The long-boat would travel slower, you know, Reeves. It holds such a lot of people —forty, or thereabout.'

'Indeed! Well, you are happier about it now, old fellow, aren't you?'

'Much happier! It was only the idea of Margarita feeling the cold and exposure, you know, that ever bothered me; but Parsons says they've got on capitally in the other boats. And there were a lot of little children on board. I shall

have to leave you to-night, Reeves, I'm sure.'

'All the better, Laurence, for such a pleasant errand. But you must eat a little more at luncheon than you did at breakfast, or your strength will break down.'

'How can one eat when one is so happy? However, I'll try, if it's only to please you. Jack, you are awfully kind to me.'

As they sat at luncheon a telegram was brought in.

'Jolly-boat just heard of from Calais. Passengers safe. Spoke with long-boat at starting. Expect she has been driven in same direction.'

'Here's a disappointment,' said Fane, wearily. 'It may be daysbefore we meet again, my darling girl.'

'Come, come, Fane, it's not so bad as it seems. You may hear of the boat's arrival any moment, and you have but to cross the Channel to her. Have you any money, old boy?'

'More than sufficient, thank you. I had not

changed my clothes when the accident occurred, and all my money was in my pocket.'

'How *did* the accident occur, Fane?'

'No one knows, and I don't suppose it will ever be satisfactorily determined. Parsons thinks some of the emigrants may have fired the ship unknowingly. Several of them were drunk.'

'It's an awful business.'

'You may well say so. I have lost all my personal property, of course, but I shall have no time to think of that till I have seen my wife and child again. Then I may begin to lament over it. At present my mind is filled with but one idea.'

He strolled down to the agents' after luncheon, and hung about their office all the afternoon, but without success. No further telegram arrived that day.

By bed-time his spirits were beginning to flag. Another night on the open sea for his tender wife and child! The thought was agony. Reeves

tried to persuade him to go to bed, but he sat up in an arm-chair all night in hopes a message might be sent to him. The morning found him in the same state of suspense as before.

It was now the fourth day since the accident had occurred. Jack Reeves left his friend moody and desponding in his apartments, and, under pretence of business, slipped down himself to the agents' office, to make private inquiries on the subject. They neither raised his hopes nor crushed them. They thought it very probable the long-boat could be heard of yet. They had known boats missing for a much longer time. She might have been blown out to sea in a contrary direction. They should not give her up themselves for weeks to come. At the same time they thought that if she had gained any of the Channel ports, intelligence would have been received of her before then.

Jack Reeves was puzzled what to do. His friend was moping at home, and expecting news

to arrive every moment, and hope deferred might make him lose heart altogether. If he heard the agents' opinion about the matter, he might shake himself up a little and try to bear the inevitable suspense with patience. On the whole he decided it would be the best to tell him. Poor Laurence did not receive the intelligence gratefully. He got into a terrible passion—cursed the agents for their stupidity—cursed the fate which had caused the only boat in which he had any interest to be the last to arrive, and finally rushed out of the house and was lost to sight for several hours, during which time he attempted by violent exercise for which he was totally unfitted, and reckless hilarity, which only made the dagger he carried in his heart stab deeper, to stamp down the demons that were wrestling for his sanity.

When the fifth and the sixth day had gone by without bringing news of the missing boat, Jack Reeves took upon himself to communicate with

the inhabitants of Maple Farm. He broke the intelligence of the calamity to them as gently as possible, and begged them to assist him in assuaging Fane's unspeakable anguish. The day after the receipt of Reeves'letter, George West came up to town. He asked to speak to his correspondent first, and the two men met in the little room below Jack's apartments.

George West was very pale and stern, and he wrung Reeves' hand in silence.

'This is a bad business,' he said at length.

'It is a bad business, Mr West, but it is not hopeless. I thought it right, however, that you should not be kept longer in ignorance.'

'Thank you. I suppose we should have heard it sooner or later, but we live so much in the dark down there. We never see a paper. I want to persuade Fane to come back with me to Maple Farm.'

'I hope you may. It would be the very thing

to rouse him. He has hardly left his seat yesterday or to-day.'

'Let us go to him.'

When they entered the room Laurence Fane was leaning forward on the table with his head resting on both his hands. As he caught sight of George West he started to his feet.

'What has brought you here?' he demanded angrily.

CHAPTER IV.

A WELCOME TELEGRAM.

IT was a strange welcome to bestow on the man who had travelled all the way up from Somersetshire to comfort him in his suspense. George West hardly knew what to make of it. He thought Fane must have been drinking.

'I have come, Laurence,' he said, almost timidly, 'because I thought I might be of use to you. This sad news only reached us yesterday.'

'What sad news?'

'Why of Daisy's—of the fact of my sister—of the boat in which——' replied, George, stammering.

'Of the fact of the boat which carries your

sister not having touched shore quite so soon as the others, I suppose you mean? What is there sad in that? They'll take good care of her, George, you may depend upon it. Nothing can exceed their kindness to the women and children. And she'll be here to-morrow or next day at latest—certainly the next day—at the very latest,' continued Fane, half to himself, as he rose from his chair and began to walk up and down the room.

'Oh, no doubt,' replied George, 'but meanwhile, old fellow, don't you think it would be as well if you were to run down with me to Maple Farm? My father and Rita feel awfully for you of course, and——'

'*Feel* for me? Why?'

This question was as difficult to answer as the other.

'Feel for your suspense, I mean, and the bother of waiting and all that, and would like to make you as comfortable in the interim as they

can. I am sure you would pass the time away more pleasantly with us than here.'

'There will be no time to pass away. I am perfectly comfortable as it is. And I cannot leave the spot. I may be wanted at any moment.'

'You could return at an hour's notice.'

'An hour would be too long. My wife will want me directly she lands. Besides, I have no wish to leave town.'

'Well, I won't worry you about it, Fane, but I should like to be of some use to you. Is there nothing I can do?'

'There's nothing to be done, but wait till she arrives. I can't understand what you are driving at.'

'I am driving at nothing except a desire to prove myself your brother, Laurence. My poor father is very anxious to see you. He feels this acutely.'

'That is, I conclude, because he has received

some garbled version of the matter, and understands nothing about it. I knew how difficult it would be to explain, and that is why I did not write to you at once. I should have liked you to hear nothing till Margarita was able to write herself. And you would have done so had it not been for this tiresome delay.'

'It is just as well,' replied George, sorrowfully; 'my father is getting very old now and cannot stand bad news as easily as he did a few years ago.'

'He will not have to stand it,' said Laurence Fane almost snappishly. 'Tell him there is no need to be anxious, and if he wishes it, Margarita and the child shall go down to Maple Farm to convince him of the fact as soon as they arrive.'

'And you will not come down yourself?'

'How can I? I am expecting a telegram every hour to summon me, heaven knows where, to meet them.'

His brother-in-law dropped the subject, and tried to discourse of irrelevant matters, but as the day wore on his presence, even, seemed a source of irritation to Laurence Fane.

'I think you will be much wiser to go back to Maple Farm yourself,' he said. 'You have your own business to attend to, and can do no good here. Tell your father I am much obliged for his sympathy, but I am thankful I do not need it. My personal losses are, after all, not so very great; for luckily I saved all my coin, and as soon as my wife joins me I shall make arrangements for a second start to Sydney. I owe this to my employers who paid my passage out. And we shall have better luck next time, depend on it. It's not likely that two vessels will be burned to the water's edge consecutively,' he ended with an unnatural laugh.

'All right!' said George West, as he rose to his feet. 'I will leave you if my presence is any annoyance. But—if—if—Daisy should *not* arrive

quite so soon as you expect, Fane, what do you propose to do then?'

'Wait here till she does come,' replied the other quietly. 'But, as I've already told you, there's no question about the matter.'

George West was very sincerely attached to Laurence Fane, and the tears came into his eyes as, before he quitted the house, he related this circumstance below-stairs to Jack Reeves.

'I can't make him out,' he said, 'he seems so sharp and irritable—so unlike himself. I thought trouble softened people's hearts instead of hardening them.'

'Not always, Mr West; and can't you see that the poor fellow is fighting like a devil against his own terrible suspicion, and the least allusion to it drives him frantic? I think it is as well you are going. Fane is just in that state when kindness maddens instead of soothes.'

'But I can't bear to leave him here, a prey to his own thoughts. This calamity is common to

us all—my poor father and cousin are feeling it dreadfully, and it seems so unnatural we should not bear it together.'

'It is not a calamity yet, remember! It is only a fear! Should his suspicions become certainties, which God forbid, I have no doubt Fane will turn to your family as his best and only comforters.'

'And meanwhile——?'

'I will keep you strictly informed of all that takes place. But it will be as well to tell you at once, Mr West, that it may be weeks or months before we receive any further news.'

'Poor Rita!' said George, as he turned away. Jack Reeves wondered he didn't say 'My poor father,' but he bid him good-bye without any further comment.

* * * *

'Fane, my dear fellow,' said Reeves a few days afterwards, 'I wish you'd review those books

for me. I'm done to death with work this week, already.'

No further information had been obtained with regard to the missing boat, and though Laurence Fane had never mentioned the circumstance, his friend knew that he took no sleep by night, and saw that he was falling into a state of greater apathy every day. He would not speak of his fears; he denied the existence of them, if alluded to; but Reeves knew that the man was quivering all over with the agony of suspense, and determined, if possible, to induce him to work, in order to distract his mind from constantly dwelling on the same fearful thought.

Fane accepted the task mechanically. He believed it was proposed solely to relieve his friend, and he read the volumes offered him with a determination that amounted to fierceness, and criticised them in sharp bitter reviews that must have made the authors' ears tingle. As soon as

he had completed his first task, Reeves procured him a second, and thus between paroxysms of hard work and dull despair the silent weeks wore round. Each morning Laurence Fane took his way down to the agents' office, and put his mechanical inquiry, to receive the hopeless answer (delivered probably in the most cheerful of voices by some careless office clerk) '*No further news to-day, sir!*' and then wended his steps back again to Jack Reeves' lodgings, to write or review or transcribe, as might suit his friend's notions best. He was in no lack of money, for Reeves insisted upon his taking the pay for his own work, and before he had been a week back in town the newspapers were glad enough to receive leaders again from their old favourite. Reeves' efforts and his own hard state of mind (for there are men who compose better in adversity than prosperity) made everything he wrote acceptable, and it seemed as though he would have little difficulty in regaining his position as a press man. Still he

laboured as if in a dream. In every stroke of his pen he read but one name and one idea, and had no more notion, when they were completed, of what his pages contained, than if he had never seen them. He was gradually sinking into a condition of sullen despair.

* * * *

The fourth week had opened. Things were in this condition still. Jack Reeves had secretly written to the Wests to prepare themselves to hear the worst, when one day a letter, sent by a private messenger from the agents' office, was put into his hand. It was addressed to Laurence Fane, but in his friend's service he had no hesitation in tearing it open. The contents were as follows:

'Dear Sir,—We have much pleasure in informing you that, per telegram just received, we learn that the passengers and crew of the "Queen of the Wave" long-boat were put on shore at

Calais last night, by a Spanish vessel, and will be forwarded to Dover by the midday boat. They may be expected to arrive there about four o'clock p.m. Any instructions with which you may favour us shall be strictly attended to.—We are, dear sir, yours faithfully,

'For Messrs ——— and ———,

'J. MANSON.'

'*At last!* Thank God!' cried Reeves, heartily. 'And now, how to break the good news to poor Fane!' He burst into the sitting-room noisily, and with a broad grin on his face.

'Jack!' said Laurence, looking up in solemn astonishment.

'You've borne disappointment like a Trojan, old fellow!' exclaimed Reeves. 'Do you think you could stand a little good news for a change?' —and then catching the expression of pain that passed over his friend's features, he continued hastily, 'It's all right, old boy. Don't break

down now, for God's sake. Your wife was landed at Calais yesterday. She will be at Dover this afternoon. She'll——Why, Fane! Fane! this is not like you,' he broke off suddenly as he saw Laurence's head sink lower and lower on the table, and heard the loud unrestrained passion of weeping with which he hailed the intelligence! For a few moments Reeves stood by his friend in silence, then Laurence dashed his hand across his eyes, and stood upright.

'Jack!—*is it true?*'

'True, Laurence! Do you think I'd be so cruel as to raise your hopes for nothing—there's the agents' letter, read for yourself, old fellow, and then tell me if it isn't true?'

'I knew we should meet again!' cried Fane in a transport of gratitude as he pressed the paper to his lips. 'I knew my darling couldn't be dead, I was sure God could never have the heart to bury so much loveliness in the cruel sea. Oh, my darling, my darling! My own wife! My

beautiful Margarita! What a hell of suspense I have suffered since I parted from you! How I have wept—how I have prayed that we might meet again! And now to think that I shall hold you in my arms, that I shall see your sweet eyes gazing into mine, that I shall feel the touch of your soft lips! Oh, I shall go mad. I shall go mad with happiness before the moment comes.'

He *was* like a madman! Neither the presence of his friend, nor his entreaties that he would calm himself, had the least effect upon him.

'How can I be quiet when I know that when this night falls I shall have my angel pillowed on my breast again? Oh, Reeves, you remember her!—her childish beauty, her sweet innocent ways, her wealth of devotion for myself. I have thought of those dimpled limbs lying beneath the water, of those dear eyes closed, that bright hair dank and tangled, till I wonder I have not made away with myself. I should have made away with myself,' he added in a hoarse whisper coming

close to Reeves' ear, 'if this blessed news had not come to save me.'

'Hush! Fane! you mustn't talk of such a thing. It is wicked—ungrateful! Think only now of the happiness in store for you.'

'I do! I do! and of the mercy of God. Stay! Where is the letter? What time will they be at Dover? Four o'clock, and now it is only ten. Six weary hours before I can see her! What shall I do with myself? How can I support life till then?'

'I'll tell you, Fane! You must first eat a good meal—you've hardly touched anything the last week—and then we will go down to Dover together. And I think if you were to shave yourself it would be advisable; you look rather deplorable at present. Meanwhile I will send a telegram off to Maple Farm.'

'Yes, do, there's a good fellow! and tell them I will take my darling down to Somersetshire tomorrow, and we shall all be together again by

supper-time. And—and—but I can remember nothing more, and you will know what to say. O! Reeves! I can think of nothing now but her. My dimpled darling; my sweet, sweet love; my precious Margarita! I think my heart will burst before I meet her. I think I shall go wild when I see her face once more—I think—I think—— Hold me, Reeves, my head is going round. O! my God! this happiness will really drive me mad!'

CHAPTER V.

THE END OF HOPE.

THE few hours that followed were very trying ones to Reeves. He could neither make Laurence Fane eat nor conduct himself in on ordinary manner. The poor creature, raised suddenly from the depths of despair to the highest pinnacle of hope, was for a time bereft of his senses. It was impossible they could start for Dover for a couple of hours, and during that time Laurence walked incessantly up and down the room, raving about his wife, and harrowing his own mind and that of his friend by minute descriptions of what he should have done had she been lost to him, or what he should do now did any accident occur to prevent their meeting. At Reeves' request he

tried to swallow food, but in his feverish condition it was physically impossible, and all he could do to keep up his strength was to drink copious draughts of brandy and water. At last they were in the train, where the presence of strangers restrained in some measure the terrible excitement which Reeves was beginning to fear would have its effects upon Laurence's health. Yet the enforced silence appeared to oppress his mind in so ghastly a manner that he was compelled to feel glad when they had reached their destination and poor Fane's tongue might be let loose again.

They had then more than a couple of hours to wait before the Calais boat could possibly arrive, but Laurence employed his time pretty well, in ordering rooms for himself and family at the hotel, and purchasing a warm shawl and similar comforts which he supposed his wife might need as soon as she came on shore. Jack Reeves watched him in silence. Now that the moment had come so near he feared—he knew not what!

But somehow the feel of the soft fleecy shawl which his friend called on him to examine and admire, made him shudder as though it had been the touch of a dead hand.

* * * * *

The afternoon was rather stormy, and a quarter to five had sounded before the Calais boat steamed up to the Dover landing-place. Laurence Fane and Reeves were the first to rush on board.

'Where are the passengers by the "Queen of the Wave" long-boat?' demanded the former breathlessly, of the first man he met.

The person he addressed stared at his impetuosity.

'Some of them are yonder,' he said carelessly, as he pointed to the stern of the vessel, 'and some of them may be below. Are you Messrs —— and ——'s agents?'

'No! No! Friends of some of the passengers,' replied Reeves, quickly.

'Oh. Well, I suppose you'll want to see the

crew. Here's one of them,' he continued, as a seaman in very tattered shirt and trousers came forward and touched his hair.

'Mrs Fane! I want Mrs Fane! Where is she?' said Laurence, addressing him.

'Mrs Fane, sir. Was she amongst the passengers by the long-boat from the "Queen of the Wave"?'

'Yes! Yes! I placed her in the boat myself. She had a baby with her.'

'Oh, you were aboard, were you, sir? It's been a bad business altogether, and we may thank the Lord we stand here together. There's many a good man has gone to the bottom in her.'

'But we are most anxious to see Mrs Fane. She is this gentleman's wife,' interposed Jack Reeves.

'Oh, well, sir, you'll find her below, I dare say, with the other lady. We had but two first-class females with us.'

'And a little child?' said Fane, anxiously.

'And a little child, sir. That's below too, I reckon, leastways they went down at Calais.'

They had no time to hear more now, but hurried off to the ladies' cabin. It was, as usual, full of women and children in every stage of sickness and every style of costume. The stewardess with becoming dignity blocked up the doorway to prevent their ingress to the sanctum, but it was no time to stand on ceremony.

'I want to see one of the passengers by the "Queen of the Wave" long-boat, the lady with the little child. I must see her, tell her her husband has come to take her on shore.'

At these words, audibly spoken, there was a scream and a slight confusion in the ladies' cabin, and a woman wrapped in a dark cloak, and still weak from sea-sickness, came staggering forward.

'Edward, I thought we should never meet again,' she exclaimed as she fell into his arms.

Poor Fane had sufficient sense left to know it was not Daisy.

'Madam! madam!' he said as he tried to shake her off, 'you have made a mistake. My name is Fane, and I came to meet my wife who is amongst the passengers. Margarita!' he continued in an agony of longing, 'oh, where are you?'

The poor woman who had made the mistake fell back from him with a burst of tears.

'You said the lady with the child,' she sobbed, 'and I thought it must be Edward. Mary, Mary,' she went on to a little girl who nestled up to her, 'we shall never meet your dear father again.'

'He may be coming,' said poor Laurence, 'there is no knowing—but my wife, cannot you tell me anything of her?'

'I don't know,' she replied. 'I understood there were only two ladies, and the other is Miss Marston, who is too ill to speak to

you. Was your wife amongst the passengers?'

'Yes! Yes! Reeves, what is this awful mystery?'

'Hush, Fane; we know nothing yet for certain. There is a sailor wants to speak to you. Come into the next cabin.'

'If you please, sir, were you inquiring after a lady missing from the long-boat?'

Reeves answered for him. Fane had already lost the capability of answering.

'Because I had the command of that there boat till the Spanisher picked us up, and I knows every soul that was in it, and I've got a list of 'em here to show to the agents as soon as ever I goes on shore,' continued the seaman, producing a piece of paper.

The friends looked at it together. After some twenty names of men, seamen, and emigrants, was written:

Ellen Marston
Amy Hudson
Mary Hudson
} Passengers.

Ann Harris Susan Harris Charlotte Harris Lydia Kay Mary Burns Ellen O'Connor Margaret Doolan Alice Doolan Jane Ellis	Emigrants.

'And are these all?' said Reeves, when they had finished.

'Them's all, sir.'

'*But where is my wife then?*' demanded Laurence Fane fiercely, as he sprang forward. 'Where are my wife and child, whom I put on board that cursed boat with my own hands? Why,' he went on hurriedly as he stared in the seaman's face, 'why, *you* are the man who took them from me. You are the man who stood at the head of the gangway, and into whose very hands I placed them.'

'True for you, sir! I dare say I am; and now I come to think of it, I remember your face as well as you seem to do mine. I did stand at the

top of that 'ere gangway and carry those poor creatures down into the boat, and I mind your giving a lady into my arms, and telling me to take care of 'er, though I never gave it a thought from that to this.'

'What have you done with her, then?' cried Fane, loudly.

'Well, sir, when I said just now as them names on that list was all, I meant all as has come on shore. But it was a bitter night as we put off, as you must know well, and for more than four days we was out at sea, driven contrary, before the Spanisher give us a helping hand, and there was some poor creatures amongst us as couldn't stand the cold and the exposure, and I reckon your lady was amongst them.'

No one answered him, but Reeves placed his hand upon the shoulder of his friend, who was standing bolt upright against the cabin wall, staring at nothing, apparently, but breathing hard.

'I have a list here,' continued the old man, as he fumbled in his trousers pocket. 'One of them as hasn't reached shore—but I cannot say certain as to their names, cos some was unbeknown to all of us. But I've got a rare memory for faces and such like, and when I got aboard of the Spanisher I asked for pen and ink and wrote down all I could remember for the sake of their friends.'

'That was thoughtful of you,' said Reeves, wishing to break the horrible silence.

'Well, sir. I thought it might be a help or a comfort, maybe, but 'taint much when all's said and done. If that Spanisher hadn't hailed us when she did, we should all have gone the same way, I fancy. And there she were outward bound for a foreign port, and we without a coin between us to send word home of our whereabouts. I thought she'd never a touched at Calais, sir.'

'I dare say you did.'

'But here's the memorandum, such as it is,' he continued, producing a crumpled piece of paper. 'Shall I read it to you, sir?'

'Yes, yes, make haste. Don't keep us in suspense.'

'"Died on the second day, Mrs Moss, emigrant; dark eyes and hair, stout, about 50 years old; and a boy called Edward, surname unknown, aged about 3.—On the third day two children fell overboard from crowding, belonged to no one, called themselves Anne and Nelly, aged about 7 and 10, light hair and eyes.—On the 4th day a young woman died from exposure; fair hair, blue eyes; aged about 20, or a little older. Had been put in boat in night-dress; name unknown."

'And I'm 'most afraid,' said the seaman, shaking his head as he folded up his document, 'I'm 'most afraid that may have been the lady you're asking after, for I mind she was very nice-looking.'

'But the child—there was a child,' said Reeves, breathlessly.

'I remember the women told me something about a baby as was knocked overboard before we started, by one of the falling spars of the vessel, sir, but I didn't take much count of it at the time. Lor! when one's life is at one's fingers' ends, as one may say, there ain't much count taken of a poor baby. But there wasn't none under three years old taken on board the Spanisher, that I know.'

'And is that really all that you can tell us?' demanded Reeves.

'It's all, sir. It's all that'll ever be known of 'em, for what we've got with us you've seen the list of; and I'm truly sorry for the gentleman, that I am, but fate is fate, and there's nothing more to be said about it. And saving your presence, sir, I'll just go and look after the emigrants going ashore, for in a way I'm responsible for

'em, and shouldn't like it to be said as I didn't do my duty.'

So saying, with a scrape and a bow, the seaman withdrew.

'Fane!—Fane! my dear fellow—this may be a false report; this may not be true!' said Reeves, anxiously, as the old man disappeared. But there was no answer to his remark.

'We will apply to the agents, Laurence, we will not rest till we have sifted this matter to the very bottom.'

He touched his friend upon the shoulder as he spoke. The upright speechless figure, without life or motion, fell prostrate on the cabin floor.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

THREE months had elapsed since the wrecked crew of the long-boat had arrived at Dover. May had returned again. In the Great Babylon, the roll of carriage-wheels, the red and white striped awnings to the balconies, the new fashions displayed in the shop windows, and the new pieces advertised in the play-bills, all told one tale, that the most beautiful season of the year had commenced, and that people who had plenty of money at their command and carte-blanche to rove the world, were about to show their want of good sense by choosing that very time of all times to remain in town and waste their strength and dissipate their good looks by hot rooms, late hours,

and indigestible food. In the country nature told a different story. There had she clothed the young woods with tender green, and spread a carpet of pale blue hyacinths, deep purple orchises, and frail white anemones. There the silver fronds of the basket and hartstongue ferns were springing up above their bed of russet leaves, whilst the birds chanted a pæan of thanksgiving for the return of so much beauty; and the fresh, soft breeze swayed the saplings to and fro, and gently moved the leaves that were too new to rustle a remonstrance. Round Maple Farm the blades of wheat and barley were just showing above the rich red earth, and the air was filled with the lowing of calves and the bleating of little lambs, that had sprung into existence with the first breath of spring. The whole country-side seemed full of life, and hope, and gladness; but under the roof-tree itself the shadow of death had fallen and blotted out its sunshine. The inhabitants of Maple Farm still went about their several employ-

ments, and performed them faithfully. They were born to labour, and had no time, luckily for themselves, to sit down with folded hands, and cry. But the misfortune that had fallen on them with the new year was not aroused the less because they mourned in silence. The edge of it had not been blunted. Old Farmer West, whose tranquillity had not been disturbed for a day before since the loss of his wife, now went about the homestead with a slouching gait and downcast eyes. When he had occasion to speak to his men on business his manner was much the same as it had ever been, though the labourers did say they had 'never known the old master cut up so sharp before;' but as soon as he believed himself unnoticed his head would sink forward on his breast, and he would saunter along the by-paths, muttering to himself, '*Drowned! My Daisy drowned!*' The brother felt it less. It had been a terrible shock at the time, but three months is an age in most young lives, and George West's was full of occu-

pation and interest. He still looked very grave if any allusion was made to their common loss, but he was nursing certain private hopes of his own just then, and the chances of their fulfilment or disappointment engrossed his mind, to the exclusion of all else. And allusion was very seldom made in Maple Farm to Daisy's death, which precaution had chiefly grown out of the abandonment of Rita's grief, which threatened at one time to affect her entire system. Even now, when some careless remark called back the past, or an old ribbon, or book, or plaything turned up to bring back the remembrance of Daisy's lovely childhood, or blooming youth, her cousin's paroxysms of anguish were so excessive as greatly to alarm her friends. But she went about her household duties as before, with the power apparently of preserving general control, and the great object of her uncle and George, was to keep the subject of her dead cousin as much as possible in the background. So the three went on their weary

roads together yet apart — the old man's hair growing whiter every day; George, longing that Rita would let him comfort her for Daisy's loss, yet not daring to make the proposition; and Rita quite unconscious of his kind intentions towards her, thinking only how she could lighten this great grief to her poor uncle, and longing— Heaven only knows how fervently — that she might soon quit a world that had become desolate to her since Daisy died. One morning she was employed in a very homely task upon the patch of grass outside the garden rails. She was counting over and feeding the occupants of some dozen coops placed on the sward. Homely as it was, the work brought the tears into her eyes, for it had always been Daisy's business to look after the young poultry—Daisy, who loved all tender creatures, from the furry kitten she carried about in her pocket, the fluffy little ducks and chickens, the ungainly spindle-shanked colts, and the innocent-faced lambs, down to the poor little red-faced

baby who shared her cruel grave. Rita caught up a lemon-coloured chick who had entangled his leg in a fallen twig, and was chirping loudly for assistance, and kissed it for Daisy's sake, whilst her tears wetted its velvet covering.

'Margarita!' called her uncle's voice from the farm porch. 'I want to speak to you, my dear. Come into my settling room.'

She brushed her hand hastily across her eyes and joined him. He was looking unusually grave, and held an open letter in his hand.

'Here's bad news from London, Margarita,' he said, without further preface. 'We're going to lose poor Laurence now.'

She staggered backward, but saved herself from falling by grasping with one hand at a chair.

'Ah, poor child,' said Mr West, 'it brings it all back again, doesn't it? That's just what I feel myself.'

There was the silence of a minute, and then he went on.

'However, what I was going to say is, here's a letter from Mr Reeves, the gentleman you know that poor Laurence has been living with, and he says he's very ill—very ill indeed—quite broken down, and he thinks some of us had better go up and see him, if we want to see him again.'

'*Dying?*' said Rita in a low voice.

'Seems like it from this letter. Seems as if every one was dying, my girl, don't it? *My poor Daisy!*' sotto voce, '*My poor drowned girl!*'

'What do you mean to do, uncle?'

'Well, I suppose George ought to go up and see him, though I don't know what use he can be; still we're his only connections, you know!'

'Uncle, *let me go!*'

The tone was so imploringly urgent, Mr West looked up in surprise.

'You, my dear! what good could you do?'

'I could nurse him, uncle, and if—if he should die—why you know how I loved Daisy, and *he* knows it, and perhaps my presence——

What Rita further meant to say was lost. But she had said enough.

'You're right, my dear; you're quite right. I wonder I did not think of it before. Of course poor Laurence would like to have you, and there's nothing, no, *nothing* like a woman in a sick room. But how will you go? Who will take you? And will Mr Reeves be able to get you apartments near enough to his?'

'Dear uncle, George can see to all that. He will go to town with me and stay there all the time. It may be a very little time. But how are we to leave you?'

'Don't you think of me,' replied the farmer roughly; 'here's this poor chap—my Daisy's own husband—delirious and dying, and I know not what, and it's our duty to go to him; and duty must be done, my dear, at any cost.'

She kissed him in reply, and said no more. She was bewildered by her own proposal, and the suddenness with which he had accepted it. But

when George was called in to the family conclave he seemed to take a different view of the matter. He was 'awfully' sorry for poor Fane, and he would go to town by the first train, but he could see no necessity for Rita accompanying him. There would be no room for her in the house; the fever might be infectious. Fane had probably a hospital nurse to attend on him, and Rita would only be in the way. The father and son argued the point for half an hour.

Margarita would take no part in the discussion. Finally it was resolved that Reeves should be telegraphed to for his opinion. The answer was decisive.

'By all means bring Miss Hay. It is just what I wanted, but was afraid to ask. No danger of infection.'

So the same afternoon saw George and Rita drive up to the door of Jack Reeves' apartments. He was in the hall to receive them.

'So good of you to come, Miss Hay,' he ex-

claimed, without waiting for an introduction. 'He's awfully ill, poor fellow. No one knows how it will end.' He drew them into the lower room to tell them all about it.

'Fane has been over-working himself ever since last February,' he said. 'I have warned him over and over again of the consequences. I have implored him to take a rest and go down and see you all at Maple Farm, but you know how steadily he has refused to do so. I suppose the poor old boy found it was the only way to kill thought, but I knew it couldn't last. Well, on Monday I left him writing here, as usual, went down to my club, came back and found him lying unconscious on the floor. I sent for a doctor, who ordered him to be conveyed to bed at once, where he lay pretty quiet for a few hours, when all of a sudden he became in a high fever, and broke out raving, and there he's been raving ever since. He won't know you, Miss Hay—he doesn't know anyone. The doctor says it's on the brain, and

he's very uncertain how it will turn out, he's brought his strength down so low by fretting. But I was sure I was right in telling you the worst.'

'We are so much obliged to you,' said Margarita, softly. 'We should never have forgiven ourselves if anything had happened without our being here. You know, perhaps, how much he has cut himself off from us all since—since——'

'Yes, yes; I understand. So he has from me and everybody. I believe it is his unnatural reticence that has brought on this illness. His trouble has broken his heart.'

'I think it would have been much better if he had taken up the Australian appointment as first proposed, instead of humbugging on here,' remarked George, with a man's disregard of sentiment.

'So do I, but it was impossible to persuade him, though the gentleman to whom he was indebted for its presentation was most anxious he

should do so. He insisted upon staying here and writing his brains out.'

'Have you heard positively nothing more of my poor sister since that day?'

'Nothing, Mr West.'

'Then I suppose there really is *no doubt* upon the subject?'

Margarita glanced at her cousin with an expression of the intensest pain. Reeves caught the glance.

'*Not the slightest.* I should not have alluded to so painful a topic if you had not started it, but since you have done it, I must tell you that on my own account I prosecuted the most searching inquiries concerning it. I even went so far as to examine the passengers by the long-boat personally, and I have no scruple in declaring, on their evidence, that the lady who died of exposure, on the fourth day, was your poor sister. How could it be otherwise? She was certainly placed in that boat, and as certainly it arrived without her.'

'You questioned all the emigrants yourself?'

'All who were of an age to give any information on the subject, or who were capable of doing so. One lady died almost immediately on coming on shore, and two imbeciles had been removed to the asylum. But this is of course nothing. I spoke to perhaps twenty adults, and they were unanimous in testifying to the death of the person referred to.'

'But I cannot understand their ignorance of my poor sister's name.'

'You must remember that they had not been forty-eight hours at sea when the accident occurred, and, as a rule, first and second-class passengers never meet. Added to which, most of the poor women were put in the boat in their night gear. So, unless Mrs Fane had told her name to some of her companions, it is impossible they could have known who she was.'

'It seems strange she should not have told it,' persisted George.

'I think there is no doubt she lost her poor little infant almost as soon as she was lowered into the boat, and her grief may have kept her silent. But come,' continued Jack Reeves, as he watched the tears that were dropping on the bosom of Rita's black dress, 'do not let us discuss this unhappy subject any longer. I have a little refreshment prepared up-stairs, of which I hope Miss Hay may be persuaded to partake, and then we will go and see our poor patient. How glad the nurse will be to welcome you, Miss Hay! She is worn out already with sitting up by night and day, with, perhaps, as unreasonable a subject as she has ever had to tackle. Poor Fane! He was patient enough, Heaven knows, whilst he had his senses, but he's making up for it now, by Jove!'

CHAPTER VII.

MARGARITA SAVES LAURENCE FANE.

THE cousins were soon able to verify Jack Reeves' assertion for themselves. Laurence Fane, in the false strength of his delirium, was terrific, and for several days and nights it was impossible the women could attend him without help. But at the end of that time the fierceness of his disorder abated, and left him passively tranquil, but so weak as to be unable to lift his hand to his mouth. The danger of death was now greater than before, but the immediate necessity for resistance was past, and so Mr Reeves and George West vacated, in a great measure, the sick room, and left the patient in the charge of his nurses, whilst they relieved the monotony of the

preceding week by a little innocent gaiety. Rita was glad when they began to spend their evenings from home. They meant to be kind to the poor creature, who lay shorn of strength and muscle, like a lay figure on his bed, but their attentions were more rough than delicate. Laurence Fane neither spoke nor moved, to all appearance the fever had left him blind, deaf, and dumb, but she was never quite sure how much he saw or heard; she was always afraid lest the audible and plain-spoken remarks on his condition, which his male friends were in the habit of making in his presence, might be as comprehensible to himself as they were to her. No one thought he could recover, not even the hospital nurse. His pulse was scarcely to be distinguished; his limbs, notwithstanding the utmost precaution, remained cold as ice; it was with the greatest difficulty that a spoonful of nourishment was occasionally forced down his throat. Every morning the doctor said that the evening would decide the case one way or

another. Every evening he was astonished to find his patient in precisely the same condition. He said he must have a constitution of iron to cling to life with so tenacious a hold, and the strength of an ox not to have fulfilled his own prognostications by dying long before. He ordered him medicine to be taken at stated intervals; but it was the beef-tea and the brandy that Margarita and the nurse poured with such untiring regularity down his throat, that saved Laurence Fane's life. These two women, each so good and devoted in her own way, lived the lives of penitents and martyrs whilst the man, who had no particular claim on either of them, required it. They never took a meal in comfort during the whole period of his illness. They would not have slept except to relieve each other of the burden of night-watching. They scarcely left the sick room but for a few moments, to inhale the fresh air at an open window, and return again. They sat beside their great child—stretched silent and helpless on bis

bed—by night and day, thinking of nothing but *his* food, *his* medicine, *his* comfort; and never praising one another or taking the least credit to themselves for their patience and assiduity and care.

At last they were rewarded. At last—it was one dusky afternoon, when the only light in the sick room was the flickering reflection of the fire—Laurence Fane, after having lain for ten days, conscious yet without showing any signs of recognition, pulled Margarita Hay by the dress, and demanded, in a broken and hollow voice,

'*Who are you?*'

She stood for a moment silent, wondering if the knowledge of her identity would harm him. Then she answered, cautiously,

'Don't you know me? I am your nurse.'

'My nurse? I have been ill then?'

'Very ill—but you are better now.'

'How strange! I thought I felt rather queer, he said, putting his hand upon his head.

'You must try not to think—we will think for you. Let me go and fetch you some tea.'

'No, no!—stay here!'

His gaunt hand clutched at her dress again as he spoke, and she was forced to remain.

'I like you,' he uttered with difficulty; 'don't go away.'

'I will not, if you are good, and promise not to talk.'

'Take my hand,' he whispered, with a faint smile.

She did as he asked her, and called to the nurse to fetch what was required; but when it was brought him Laurence Fane, still grasping her dress, had fallen again to sleep. So she had to sit for more than an hour whilst he slept and held her. How the weakness engendered by her long vigils made her tremble at the contact!

When he roused the next morning he seemed quite conscious and spoke coherently. The hospital nurse, whose turn it was to sit up, came into

Margarita's room with the joyful intelligence.

The girl dressed herself hastily, and going down-stairs, advanced to the bedside with a face full of pleasure.

'I am so glad you are better,' she said, tenderly. But at the first glance he cast at her, his countenance became overshadowed, first with surprise and then with an indescribable horror.

'*Who—who are you?*' he gasped out again, evidently forgetting all about the day before.

'Don't you know me, Mr Fane? I am Margarita,' she said affectionately.

'*Margarita!*' he repeated, with knitted brows.

'Yes!' ('*Daisy's cousin,*' she was about to add, but remembered herself in time.) 'Margarita Hay, from Maple Farm. Don't you remember your old friend George, Mr Fane, and poor uncle, and all the rest of us at Bushthorne?'

He gave a deep groan, and turned his face round on his pillow.

'Yes! Yes! *I remember!*' he said slowly.

'When we heard you were ill,' continued Rita, thinking now the ice was broken he had better hear it all at once, 'George and I came up, Mr Fane, to nurse you. Poor George has been so anxious about you, Mr Fane. He is not up yet, but as soon as he is he will be delighted to hear you are better. When you were at the worst, he and Mr Reeves were with you day and night.'

'It is very good of you all,' he answered wearily.

'But we were so glad to be of any use. And now there is nothing left for you to do but to get quite well and strong again. Bring me the warm water, nurse,' she went on cheerfully, 'and I will wash Mr Fane's face and hands, whilst you get ready his breakfast. Now, Mr Fane, you must lie quite still and let me do just what I please with you. You have no idea what a good child you have been all through your illness, so I hope you won't begin to be naughty and tiresome now.'

'I suppose I couldn't do it for myself?' he

said wistfully, as he watched the preparations.

'Not just yet; but I dare say you will to-morrow or next day. You will be out of our hands before you know it, and turning up your nose disdainfully at the idea of being helped. But at present you would find it too great an effort.'

She washed his face and hands and brushed his hair, and could hardly prevent tears rushing into her own eyes at the hopeless expression she met in his. He submitted to the operation passively, and eat and drank the food that was offered him, but from the moment that memory returned with consciousness, Laurence never smiled or proffered a remark again. He seemed to lie on his bed and *think*, night and day. Neither Jack Reeves' jokes nor George West's earnest solicitude could extract more from him than the most apathetic reply. The progress he had made so steadily stopped short. He waked up each

morning as languid as he had been the day before.

'This will never do,' exclaimed the doctor, who began to think his credit was at stake. 'There is no strength to spare for falling off, we must rouse our patient, Miss Hay, we must rouse him effectually, or he will never get up from that bed again.'

But how was he to be roused, that was the question. It was discussed in conclave again and again, without effect. The men tried all they could do in the way of cheerful conversation, but their jests were unresponded to, and their pleasant stories fell pointless to the ground. The gaunt figure on the bed could neither laugh nor cry, and Margarita Hay prayed incessantly that some way might be opened for her to move his lifeless feelings. At last she nerved herself for a powerful effort. The medical man had spoken most despondently that morning of his patient's state, and the girl felt desperate. She knew that

she had read his inmost thoughts aright, and determined that at all risks she would speak out. But the road must be cleared for action.

'Nurse,' she said in her most insinuating manner, when her cousin and Mr Reeves had left the house, 'I want you to go for a walk to-day, and let me remain with Mr Fane. This may go on for some time longer, and we shall both be incapacitated for nursing if we neglect to take exercise.'

'You're quite right there, Miss,' replied the unsuspecting nurse, 'and I will go as soon as ever I've put the room tidy.'

So in another hour Margarita found herself alone with Laurence Fane. Now that the time was come she trembled, but it was with excitement, not with fear. She took her work and sat down by his side.

His worn and haggard eyes were fixed upon the blank prospect of wall from his bed-room

window, and he did not stir or speak at her approach.

'Mr Fane,' she began, with assumed cheerfulness, 'now that I have got you all to myself, I want to scold you a little. The doctor is very much disappointed at the slow progress you are making, and so are we all. You were getting on so nicely at first, and now you seem to gain no strength whatever. And I think it is partly your own fault.'

He turned his hollow eyes toward her then, but he did not attempt to refute her assertion.

'You mustn't think me unkind to say so,' continued Margarita, 'but if you would make an effort to shake off the sad thoughts that oppress you, you would aid very much in your own recovery. Of course we all know how difficult it would be;—we know that—that—we can feel—we can understand——'

But here all Margarita's philosophy gave

way, and the scalding tears she could not restrain, forced down her cheeks.

'Oh, Mr Fane!' she went on suddenly, as her work slipped from her hold and she turned round and grasped his passive hand, '*Do you think I can't feel for you!* My precious Daisy! My sweet, sweet girl! It breaks my heart even to think of her, and yet I have had to keep it in for the sake of others.'

She turned her streaming eyes to his, and the sight unlocked the fountain of his own silent grief.

'*You* know how I loved her!' she went on impetuously. 'You know how she was the light of my whole life. Can you imagine what I felt when I heard that I should never see her dear face again—that she was lost to me for ever, and in such a cruel, cruel way. Oh, don't think me heartless for speaking to you like this. My heart is breaking for your trouble and my own, but I am sure it will be less hard to bear if we speak of

it to one another. You have locked yours up in your own breast, and it is killing you by inches. Be wise. Be merciful to those who hope for your recovery. Don't do such violence to your feelings any more. Speak to me of your lost darling. Tell me how sweet, and pure, and good she was; how much you loved her, how wretched you are without her; and I will weep with you till we can weep no longer. Tell me you never can be happy again—that you are going mad with grief at losing her; but speak, Mr Fane. For the sake of our dead darling speak, and don't let this unnatural silence poison your existence any longer.'

He turned towards her then. He could not speak, but he was weeping. Slowly the tears came at first, as though from want of courage they could not force their way over his dry and heated eyeballs; but as she talked to him and wept over him, they came faster and faster, until a gust of passionate emotion seemed

to break down the barriers of reserve for ever.

'You have saved me,' he articulated hoarsely, when the tempest was somewhat abated. 'I did not wish to live. I had no hope left for this world; but whilst there is work to do I will try to do it, Rita, for your sake—and hers.'

CHAPTER VIII.

GEORGE IS DISAPPOINTED.

AFTER this outburst of feeling, Laurence Fane's recovery was rapid, and in June they took him down to Maple Farm. The doctor had advised him at all hazards to try country air for a few months after his illness, and he was too weak and dependent still to form any decided opinion on the matter. So, gaunt and emaciated, looking more like a living skeleton than a man, and with the new hair on his shorn head just advanced to that stage when, as George West irreverently remarked, it would make an excellent blacking brush, Laurence said good-bye to his kind hospital nurse and Jack Reeves, and allowed himself to be driven to the railway station and conveyed

to Bushthorne as if he had been a mummy or a bundle of old clothes. Once established at the Farm (where every one tried as much as possible to divert his mind from dwelling on the past), and the painful meeting with old Mr West over, he gained flesh and strength every day. It was a great trial to him when he first left his room and crept down-stairs to the familiar parlour, where he had first learned to love Daisy—where he had told her of his affection—where she had sat with his child upon her knee—and felt that as far as her presence was concerned it was deserted evermore. His emotion on that occasion was so violent, and the subsequent prostration so extreme, that his father and brother-in-law were quite alarmed, and wanted to send to Taunton for a doctor. But Rita came to their assistance, and spoke to the bereaved husband so sweetly and soothingly of his wife's present condition,—not lying under the cold water with her fair features marred by the progress of decay, but serenely

happy in some brighter sphere than this, with her baby cradled on her bosom, that the man's strong grief was lulled into a gentle melancholy, under the influence of which he became once more tranquil. And when the first bitterness was over he began to take pleasure in thinking he was in his Margarita's home, surrounded by the people who had loved her, and the inanimate objects she had been wont to use. With the idea of sparing his feelings they had placed him in a bed-room far away from the one he had occupied with her; but as he grew stronger and more calm, he asked as a favour to be allowed to sleep in it again.

'I want to be on the same mattress my darling lay on, and to be surrounded by the objects she last used on shore. O! Rita, I can see her now as she sat that last evening over her bed-room fire, with her baby at her breast, chatting to me of the voyage that was before us. How hopeful she was; how unsuspecting. How contented to go any-

where so she went *with me!* My poor love, how little I thought I was dragging you to your death.'

Rita encouraged him in his confidence. She never bid him think of other things, nor try to salve over the wound with the ointment of distraction. On the contrary she talked with him. She enlarged on the subject. She brought him every relic of Daisy's which she most cherished, till he could weep over them no longer. She let his grief have fullest vent, and the evil worked its own cure. In a very few weeks Laurence Fane could talk of his dead wife without emotion, though he seemed never tired of talking of her.

But his confidences were kept exclusively for Rita's ear. The subject was still too sore a one for him to dilate on openly. He never mentioned Daisy's name to her father or her brother, and the men were unaware of the extent to which it was familiar to Margarita Hay.

Laurence spoke of her as 'Margarita' now. It had been a terrible effort at first. That name

by which he had called his dead wife only at the most sacred moments, was hallowed in his eyes, and he could not bear to hear it lightly mentioned. But after a while, the sound had soothed him. It did not seem as though *his* Margarita were quite gone, while her name-sake remained to whisper words of comfort.

'Margarita,' he had said one day, softly, whilst she sat working by his side.

Do you want anything?' inquired Rita, glancing at him.

'No! I did not mean you! I was thinking of my Margarita.'

A look of pain passed over her features, and he saw it.

'Forgive me!' he said, 'I did not mean to distress you.'

'You do not distress me, except for yourself. I wish, for your sake, I had any other name.'

'Don't say that. It is becoming a pleasure to

me to think you are so called. Don't you believe me, *Margarita?*'

The girl coloured. Grief and nursing, added to her previous ill-health, had left her but the shadow of her former self; but when she coloured, her likeness to her once blooming cousin was most apparent.

'You look like my Margarita now,' said Laurence, earnestly, seizing her hand; 'like what she might have been had she nursed me through this tedious illness, without any consideration for her own health and comfort. My kind nurse—my dear sister! how can I thank you sufficiently? I have tried so often to do it and failed. Let me call you "Margarita," and every time you hear the name, think that *she* is thanking you with me for all your goodness to me! I should have died without you—*Margarita!*'

She could not trust her voice to answer him; but from that moment Fane and his dead wife's cousin were 'Laurence' and 'Margarita'

to each other. But as soon as he was well enough to exert his fingers and his brain, Margarita would not let the young widower spend his time any longer in moping about the garden and the orchard; or pouring his lamentations over the irrevocable past into her sympathizing ear. She was a woman of energy and action, and she knew that grief has little chance of cure in idleness. So she brought her now convalescent patient pens and ink and paper, and insisted upon his writing something. Fane was not unwilling to take her advice. The last month had made a wonderful improvement in his strength and spirits, and he was longing to get into harness again. Men as a rule treat their troubles very differently from women. A blight crosses the sunshine of their lives as a cancer springs up in the body—suddenly, but surely. There is no tampering with such a scourge, they must kill it or else it will kill them; so out comes the knife, and one deep sharp incision erases it for ever. But women bathe

their mental cancers with milk and water, or something equally innocuous, and bind them up tenderly, and shrink when they are exposed to the light, and are as far from cure as at the first, when men are walking the world once more, upright and free and heart whole.

Laurence Fane was not a man to forget easily. To the last day of his existence, the thought of Daisy would be a tender, sacred memory in his heart, but he was thankful to find, that with reaction came a new desire of life. He was not so much in love with his cancer as to desire to keep it when the Almighty Goodness provided a cure. So that when he found that he could think and compose again, and with the power to please himself, he set to work with a will, and became almost cheerful. Margarita and he were not separated by the new duty. He had been rather assured and self-indulgent with the feeling consequent on his long illness, and being as yet far from strong, found it convenient to call his guardian

nurse whenever he wanted a quotation found, or a book of reference, and sometimes even an idea! He was astonished to find by reason of this intercourse, how nearly their minds were on a level, how well read she was, and how aptly her memory retained her learning. The course of self-instruction she had undergone at his instigation had borne its fruit, and Laurence often detected himself wondering he had never discovered the riches of this girl's intellect before, and whether the man she married (if she ever married) would be able to appreciate the treasure he would gain. During the course of their many confidences he had told her all about his former literary reviews, the complete defeat he had suffered at the hands of his enemies, and the utter despondency it had engendered. But Margarita had not condoled with him on that occasion. Her eyes had flashed fire, and she had said decidedly:

'I would not have let them triumph over me, Laurence. I would have got up on my feet,

again and again, never mind how bruised and beaten, and so long as I felt myself to be in the right, have defied them to crush me for ever. What is the good of a mind like yours if it has not strength added to its power? A weak man cannot do more than fly. And right and might *must* conquer in the end, if the whole world is against it. If I had had any influence over you at that time I should have said to you, "Stay! It is only a coward who leaves the field whilst the battle is raging. Even if you wield your sword from the gaol or the workhouse, stay and fight with the weapons God has given you until he takes them from your hand." '

She stopped, fearing lest her words should seem to cast any reflection on Daisy's former influence, but Laurence did not seem to notice the unintentional allusion. He had caught her energetic tone and echoed it.

'You are right, Margarita!' he exclaimed. 'How strange that I should seem to hear the

truth for the first time from your lips. I *was* a coward. I tried to fly when I should have fought. But I will never do so again. I see now that Heaven has given me these talents for a peculiar purpose, and I will exercise them. There is nothing to tempt me to a different course,' he added in a lower tone, 'I have but myself to work for now.'

This was an unanswerable assertion, and Margarita did not refute it. She only sighed and resumed her work.

But there was one person who viewed this continual intercourse between Laurence and his cousin with increasing disapproval, and that was George West. He complained incessantly of the state of affairs: declared that Fane kept Margarita from more important duties; and that now he was convalescent, there was no earthly reason he should not return to town. To sympathize with the husband of your deceased sister up to a certain point is all very well, but to watch the

woman you want to make your wife sympathizing with him also, and much more effectually than yourself, is not so pleasant. At all events George West did not find it so. He spoke to Margarita on the subject, but she blushed and laughed his objections on one side, and then he mentioned it to his father.

'It's anything but agreeable for me,' he said grumblingly. 'Here's poor Daisy gone, and Rita turned into a hospital nurse, with no eyes nor ears for any one but Fane. The fellow's quite able to fetch and carry for himself. Why doesn't he go back to London and look out for another wife if he wants somebody to run after him all day. I'm getting sick of it, and shall cut my stick and go back to Australia if it's to go on like this much longer.'

'I can't give Fane a hint to return to town,' replied his father. 'He's my poor dead girl's husband, and it shall never be said he hasn't a home at Maple Farm. But if you're anxious

about Rita, George, why don't you put the question to her at once. Girls don't like a man any the better for being timid of them. Ask her downright to marry you, and I'll lay a hundred of wheat to a bundle of chaff she'll say "yes."'

'Do you really think so?' demanded George, eagerly.

'Of course I do! Why shouldn't she? She's known you all her life, and there isn't your equal within twenty miles of Bushthorne. Just you ask her, George, and have done with it. I shall be glad myself when the business is settled; for though Margarita's always been like a daughter to me, she will be doubly so as your wife. I shall almost forget then,' continued the old farmer with half a sob, 'that my pretty one's gone.'

On this hint George spoke. It was now September. Eight months had gone by since the news of the wreck of the 'Queen of the Wave' had arrived to sadden their little household. The broad band of crape round the old farmer's hat

had grown rusty and brown, and Margarita occasionally tied up her hair with a purple ribbon, or wore a bunch of autumn flowers in her bosom to relieve the blackness of her mourning garb.

Even Fane had been known to lounge about the farm in a grey tweed shooting coat—everything was beginning to look a little less gloomy, and George thought it was a favourable opportunity for him to speak. So he followed his cousin about one afternoon when she was performing some charitable duties in the village, until she turned round laughingly to ask him what he wanted.

'I want to speak to you, Rita! I have wanted to speak to you for some time past.'

'Have you, George? What is it?'

'I know I shall make a mess of it,' he began in his blundering fashion, 'but, look here, Rita, we've known each other ever since we were little children, haven't we? and I always cared for you

a great deal more than I did for poor Daisy, and now that I am the only one left, of course, whenever my father goes, Maple Farm and all that he has to leave will be left to me.'

'George, whatever are you driving at?'

'Why, I want you to say that you'll share it with me, Rita. You've always said you looked on me as a brother, and so it will seem much more natural, I should think, that you should stay here instead of going anywhere else.'

'But I'm not going anywhere else.'

'They'll ask you some day—some one will ask you, Rita—and that's why I speak first, and if you'll be my wife——'

'*Your wife, George?*'

Had the man really been her brother, he could hardly have surprised her more.

'Yes. My wife. Why not?'

'How can you talk of such a thing! Why I am your sister—as much your sister as our poor lost darling was—in heart if not in deed. I

couldn't be your wife. The idea is horrible to me!'

'Sister! Nonsense,' replied George, with a frown. 'You are my cousin. You know it perfectly well, and I have loved you for years, Rita.'

'Yes, as a brother, nothing more. George, whatever made you dream of ever being anything else?'

'How could I help dreaming of it when I see how sweet and dear you are. Rita, don't say "no," all at once. You're very fond of my poor father, and the old man wants you for a daughter. He says he shall think he has got Daisy back again if you marry me. And you will live here amongst all the people you know so well, and have the house poor Daisy was born and brought up in for your own. Say "yes," Rita; say you'll be my wife.'

'I can't, George,' said the girl firmly. 'I wish I could.'

'That is not true? If you wished you could, you could.'

'Not with honour to myself. I wish I could for uncle's sake, and perhaps a little for yours, for I owe him everything, George, and it hurts me dreadfully to give you pain. But I can't, I can't. It would be a lie.'

'Why don't you say at once that you hate me?' said the young man sullenly.

'Because that would not be true either. I don't hate you, George, I am very fond of you; so fond that I could give anything had this not been. I would work for you and your father to the last day of my existence, if it could do you any good, and prove my gratitude, but I can't marry you. It would be the cruelest thing in the world.'

'Why can't you leave me to judge of that? I am willing to take you as you are.'

'Because you don't know my heart as I know it,' replied Rita, sorrowfully. 'How obstinate it

is, how reserved, how much it lives within itself. George, don't speak to me any more on this subject; you can't think how it pains me.'

'I shall not speak to you again, but I must say all I have to say now. Think of it once more, Rita. I have loved you for years, and I will make you mistress of all I have. When my father dies you will be without a home. What are you to do then?'

'Beg! sooner than marry a man for what he can give me,' said the girl, proudly.

'You are so touchy, one can hardly speak to you, but you must know what I mean. Marry me, dear Rita, and let me place you above all want.'

'Oh, George! I know you are far too good and kind to me. My dear cousin, I like you too much to marry you. I am a loving sister. I should be a very unloving wife. Don't torture me any more on the subject, but try and forget

all about it or we shall no longer be able to live in peace together.'

'*Try and forget all about it!*' echoed George West. 'That is the way you women give us stones when we have asked for bread. How *can* I forget all about it when your presence will remind me of it every day.'

'If you say that, I shall have to leave Maple Farm.'

'No, no, Rita. I didn't mean it. Don't leave us, for heaven's sake. Give me your sister's love still, and I will try and stamp out the memory that I ever asked for more. But is your decision really final? Will you never change your mind?'

'Never, George. It is impossible. If we lived to the age of Methusaleh, I should give you the same answer. *I cannot marry you.*'

'Very good,' he answered curtly, as he turned on his heel; 'then I dare say some one else will.'

CHAPTER IX.

HE TRIES TO CONSOLE HIMSELF.

GEORGE WEST was absent from the supper table that evening. His father asked for him, and Laurence Fane asked for him, but he was not forthcoming. The servants knew nothing of his whereabouts, and when they questioned Margarita she only blushed and said she had not seen him since the afternoon.

'Come here, my girl!' said the farmer approvingly, as he watched her reddening cheeks. 'I think you must have been buying some of those rouge pots with the new-fangled names, when you were up in London t'other day. I never saw you look so well as you've done for the last month. Is it the weather, or is it the work,

or have you got some pleasant secret fluttering about in this little heart—eh, Rita? You look for all the world like my poor Daisy to-night! Doesn't she, Laurence?'

'Don't, uncle! expostulated Rita, in a low voice; but Laurence had already glanced her way. He finished his scrutiny with a deep sigh, and cast down his eyes upon his book again.

'Where's George, my pretty?'

'I don't know, uncle!'

'Ah, you rogue!' pinching her cheeks.

'Indeed, I don't know why you should call me so. I walked with George to the village to-day, and he left me at the Taunton cross-roads. I have not the least idea where he has been since.'

'Gone to visit the Taunton jeweller, perhaps. Eh, pussy?'

She knew what he was hinting at, and grieved to think how disappointed he might be when he came to hear the truth. And the know-

ledge made her so gentle and caressing in her manners toward the old man, that Fane could not help watching her, and thinking that he had never seen such a combination of womanly grace and tenderness and strength of mind before.

George did not make his appearance until the following day at noon. Then, muddy and rather disordered-looking, he flung himself into his father's sanctum, and slammed the door behind him.

'Well, father,' he commenced roughly, 'I've followed your advice. I'm going to marry.'

'I'm so glad,' said the old farmer, rubbing his hands. 'I thought it was all right last night when I saw our little Rita, colouring up like a peony whenever your name was mentioned. I congratulate you, George. Give me your hand. She's the best and dearest girl in the world, and you'll have a wife in a thousand.'

'Hold, hold, old boy. You're hitting rather

beyond the mark. I said I was going to marry, but I didn't say whom.'

'Whom should you marry but Rita, George?'

'Why, she's not the only woman in the world, is she, father? She's a jolly good girl, and all that sort of thing, of course. I've nothing to say against Rita; but still we've grown up rather too much, I fancy, like brother and sister, to be able to change our tactics now.'

'But you told me you loved her!'

'So I did. So I do! And I spoke to her about it, into the bargain, but she talked me out of the notion, and I think, after all, she's right. I never made any difference between her and Daisy, you know; and it seems rather unnatural that we should begin to think of each other now as husband and wife. I could have done it, I dare say; but Rita doesn't fancy it—and—and—well, we agreed to say no more on the subject!'

'I'm very sorry,' said his father, with a downcast countenance. 'I quite reckoned upon getting

our little Rita for a daughter. And now some one else will be taking her away from us. I'm an old man, George, and sha'n't be of much use long, and when I'm laid up by the fire, the homestead will look very lonely without a woman about it!'

'That's just what I think,' replied George, eagerly, 'and so I'm determined to marry, whether or no. I consider it my duty. And I've got the promise of a girl who'll make you as good a daughter as any one, father, and me as good a wife as I shall want.'

'Why! have you been courting any one else, George?'

'I don't know what you call "courting." I put the question to Carrie Hughes, and she took me like a shot.'

'*Carrie Hughes!*' ejaculated the farmer, in astonishment. 'What, the little fat one!'

'Well, I suppose she won't make the worse wife for that,' replied his son, curtly. 'She's been

sweet on me—so her brother says—for the last twelve months, and it is but fair she should have her innings now.'

'Carrie Hughes,' repeated Mr West, 'and that's where you have been passing the night, I suppose then, George?'

'Yes. I walked over yesterday afternoon, and they asked me to stay. And Carrie's not half such a bad girl you know, father, when all's said and done.'

'Oh, no! I've nothing to say against her, though my poor Daisy used to laugh uncommonly at Alfred Hughes's sisters.'

'Daisy used to laugh at everybody.'

'Still I can't help wishing it had been our Rita. She has grown up amongst us ever since she was a baby. She was as fond of my dear girl as if she had been her own sister. And she's the very image of her poor mother that's dead. I should have liked to have had Margarita Hay for a daughter, George.'

George rose from his seat, turned his back to his father, and looked steadily out of the sanctum window.

'Look here, dad,' he said after a pause, 'don't you mention that to me again. It's not to be, and there's an end of it. I asked her several times, and she said "No." She said she should never say anything but "No" if she lived to be as old as Methusaleh. And I'm not going to let my heart be broken for the sake of any woman in the world.'

'You're quite right, George; you're quite right, and I hope Carrie will make you the wife you deserve. Still, still——'

But his son had left the room before he could complete his sentence.

The announcement of George's intended marriage excited much discussion in the household.

'The idea of his choosing one of those pug-nosed, red-haired little Hugheses,' said Fane in

confidence to Rita. 'What can be the secret of it?'

'You had better ask him, Laurence.'

'I think I should get at the truth better by asking you.'

'What nonsense!'

'*Is* it nonsense? I heard about George's aspirations in a certain quarter long ago. I remember my poor Daisy telling me all about them when we were at Maple Farm together. She thought it the most natural thing in the world, dear loving little girl, that you should marry him. I said I was sure you never would. Was I not right?'

'You have just heard he is going to marry Carrie Hughes. We don't countenance bigamy down at Bushthorne.'

'But you never would have married him, would you, Margarita?'

'Certainly not. I look on George as a brother.'

'But if you had not looked on him as a brother,

still you wouldn't have married him, would you?'

'How pertinacious you are. Why don't you try and dissect my feelings with regard to Alfred Hughes or Mr Reeves?'

'Because I have no interest in *them*, Margarita.'

CHAPTER X.

WHAT IT LEADS TO.

LAURENCE FANE would not be persuaded to leave Margarita Hay alone on the subject of the projected marriage. When, by means of cross-questioning, coaxing, and confident assertion, he had extracted from her the confession that George had proposed and been rejected, he professed to become curious to ascertain what motive she could have had for treating her cousin so badly.

'He's an awfully good fellow, you know,' he said, slyly, 'a little rough, perhaps, but a perfect gentleman, and as upright and honourable a man as ever I came across. And he was very

fond of you, Margarita. What made you behave so ungratefully as to refuse him?'

He would go on until Margarita was almost ready to cry.

'It is too bad of you to tease me, Laurence, in this way,' she replied. 'You have told me again and again that you always said and felt sure I should never marry my cousin. Why can't you believe that your instinct was mine? I have no reason to give—except that I did not wish it.'

'I knew you wouldn't do it, but I did not know that you would be wise not to do it. It does not answer in this world, Margarita, entirely to sacrifice worldly prudence to inclination. Just see what a good property this is, and how comfortably it would have kept you to the end of your days. And now to think that these servants and dairies and gardens, over which you have reigned paramount for years, are to be delivered into the hands of that red-haired little animal, Carrie Hughes. Isn't it vexatious?'

Margarita now felt more inclined to laugh than cry.

'Not to me, Laurence. I shall be very glad to make them over to her, and only hope she may like the duty better than I have done. Just think how much leisure I shall have for my books and writing. I may be an author yet—in time!'

'And you are content to play second fiddle?'

'Quite so, if it makes George or my uncle any the happier. I only hope his marriage *may* make George happier. Yet I cannot imagine any one who has had *such a sister,*' in a lower tone, 'caring for a woman like Carrie Hughes.'

'Or such a cousin!' interpolated Fane.

'Yes, I think I may echo, without any very great vanity, "or such a cousin." Because Carrie is so frivolous, you know, Laurence; so silly and affected and giggling,—so totally unlike our dead darling—or me.'

'But there never were any other such women as Daisy and you.'

'That is your fancy—because you know that I loved her almost as well as you did. We were very ordinary girls except in our affection for one another. Oh, Laurence, how often I wonder if she can see and hear us now.'

'If she does, it must make her very happy to see we are such friends.'

'I hope so! oh, I hope so! With your friendship, Laurence, and the prospect of meeting her in heaven, I have all that I need to make life easy to me.'

'Do you never dream of its being something more than easy, Margarita?'

She shook her head.

'Not without my Daisy. And one reason, Laurence, why I never could have married my cousin George, even if all other considerations had prompted me to do so, is, that he does not care for our darling as we do.'

She used the possessive pronoun in the plural almost unconsciously, but Fane heard and commented on it.

'That is what has drawn us so closely together,' he said, quietly. 'Your kindness to me, Margarita—your care—your sympathy—would not have possessed half their power had I not known that your heart was bleeding in unison with mine. Whatever may happen to us in the future, we shall always have one interest in common—our love for the dead. We can never forget it, nor disown it, nor—nor—be jealous of the claim it makes upon each other's hearts.'

He had never spoken so tenderly to her before, and Margarita trembled, and could not answer him. There was silence between them for a few moments. He was the one to break it.

'This contemplated marriage,' he commenced briskly, as though desirous to shake off any impression his words may have left behind

them, 'is to take place about Christmas, is it not?'

'I believe so.'

'Well, it will have one good effect—to make me clear out of Maple Farm.'

'Will you leave us?'

'My dear girl, how can I stay? It was all very well whilst you were alone. Your uncle has been kind enough to let me pay my share of the housekeeping expenses, which put me completely at my ease, and made me look on the farm almost as my home; and I am not sure, if things had continued in the same way, whether I should not have stayed here altogether. It is so jolly and quiet, and I have lost all taste for gaiety. Besides, I can do such a lot of work. (By the way, Margarita, I heard from my publisher this morning, and the new book is selling admirably. They expect to go into a second edition next week. Isn't that good news?) But when this bride comes home it will be quite a different affair. I

should not have stayed under a new *regime* any way, and least of all that of Miss Carrie Hughes. I hate the thought of the little fat vulgar thing.'

'So we shall lose you,' said Margarita, thoughtfully.

'I hope not, Margarita; but I shall go back to London; there is no doubt of that.'

'And live with Mr Reeves?'

'Perhaps, or in lodgings by myself.'

'You will be so lonely,' she murmured.

'I should be that anywhere. But remember, I have a great deal of work before me—work which you have taught me to consider as a sacred duty. Perhaps it is all for the best I should be within sound of the battle.'

No more was said on the subject at that moment. Perhaps they felt mutually they could not trust themselves to say more.

The engagement of the young squire of Maple Farm was inaugurated by a series of festivities, most uncongenial to the feelings of Margarita and

Laurence Fane. The whole tribe of Hugheses, arrayed in silks of divers colours, bore down upon the farm-house, and made themselves completely at home; apportioning the various apartments to the use of the bride elect, and freely commenting on the arrangements of the household, which they considered quite inadequate to the requirements of the future Mrs George West.

'I dare say it has all done well enough for your poor dear uncle and yourself, you know, my dear,' said old Mrs Hughes in confidence to Margarita Hay, 'but when my Carrie comes here I shall consider a drawing-room quite a necessity; for she has been brought up at Apsley House, Taunton, amongst what you may call quite the elegancies of life. And the bed-room papers are shocking, my dear, positively shocking! I suppose Mr George will have them all re-decorated before the happy couple return from their wedding "tower." Carrie's room at Apsley House, Taunton, is trimmed with blue and white, and I

fancy she would like to have blue and white in her new home,—it's so becoming to a delicate complexion, you know. But these are things no young lady can speak about; so perhaps you will see to its being done.'

'You really must not ask me, Mrs Hughes. I shall have nothing whatever to do with the preparations for the wedding.'

'Indeed! I thought you were quite your good uncle's right hand. So Miss Daisy used to tell us. Poor dear girl! How she would have enjoyed this little change. And to think she's gone! Does Mr Fane feel her loss much, my dear? He looks quite hearty!'

'He is pretty well again now,' replied Margarita, trembling with pain and indignation, 'but he has been terribly ill.'

'Ah! a sad loss! But I dare say he'll console himself before long. Gentlemen are very fickle, my dear; though I suppose I oughtn't to say so when my Carrie has just got a beau!

'What colour do you wear at the wedding?'

'I shall not wear any colours. I shall not even go to the wedding. My cousin has not been dead twelve months yet,' replied Margarita, hotly.

'Not go to the wedding! I call that very strange. I was just going to ask you to oblige us by being one of Carrie's bridesmaids; but of course that is out of the question now. And I don't think it is very becoming of you, my dear, to set up your opinion against that of your uncle and Mr George. *They* don't think it's too soon.'

'Perhaps not. It makes no difference to me. My uncle wishes me to please myself in the matter, and I prefer to remain at home. I never did care for weddings.'

'Ah! well, my dear, we shall hear you tell a different story some day, when Mr Right makes his appearance. But I must go and consult dear Carrie about the drawing-room.'

And so the odious woman left her to herself

and the thoughts of her aching heart. These constant irruptions of the Hughes family became at last almost unbearable. Laurence Fane had to move his desk and belongings from the oak parlour into his own room, and even there was not always safe from interruption.

One afternoon, after having listened to the loud voices of Miss Carrie and her mamma and sisters dying away in the distance, he cautiously emerged from his hiding-place, and found Margarita alone in the sitting-room, bathed in tears.

'What is the matter?' he inquired, anxiously.

'Oh, I am foolish. I am wrong, I suppose,' replied the girl, as she attempted to conquer her emotion; 'but that woman will drive me wild! What do you think she has been doing, Laurence? What do you think she has *dared* to do? Carried away my Daisy's chair—the little low chair my darling always sat on by my side—which she

used ever since she was a little girl. Oh, Laurence, I have seen her in that chair ever since I can remember;—I could shut my eyes at any moment and fancy I still saw her laughing mouth and merry eyes beaming at me from it. And Mrs Hughes knew it all—I told her of it—and yet she presumed to say it was just what her Carrie wanted, and she should take it home with her. *And George let her!* He put it into the carriage himself, and said if the ladies wished to have it it could make no earthly difference to me. I couldn't have believed it of him, Laurence; it makes me feel as if I hated him!'

Fane sat down near her, and placed his hand upon her shoulder.

'Poor girl!' he said, soothingly. 'Poor Margarita! I can understand how bitter it must have been. And this is not the worst of it. If these women are allowed to worry you now, how much more will they do so when they have acquired the right to interfere? Have you thought of it, Mar-

garita—of what this house will be like when Carrie Hughes is mistress here?'

'Often! But of what use is it to think? I believe my uncle loves me too well to allow me to be insulted in any way. And for the rest, I shall live as much as possible in my own room.'

'A cheerful prospect, truly. These vulgar women running rampant over the premises, and you, poor child, cooped up in your bed-room. Why, you'll die of sheer loneliness.'

'I am tougher than you think for, Laurence. I am not afraid of silence or of solitude. But what I *do fear* is having my heart lacerated. To hear *her* name lightly spoken of—her actions commented on—her memory perhaps ignored—it is *that* will kill me.'

'You shall not stay to hear it!' exclaimed Laurence. 'I will not have your warm, loving affections trampled on in so shameful a manner. Margarita, save yourself from such an indignity.'

'How, Laurence?'

'By filling the place of her whose memory is so sacred to us both. No! don't take your hand away, or look as though I had said anything to shock your delicacy. Listen to me. I am not offering to you the love I gave to my dead wife. I cannot do it if I would. I loved her with the first fresh feelings of an unsophisticated heart. I poured out all the wealth of my affection on her dear head. I idolized her, Margarita, if ever a man idolized a creature, and I can never love any woman in that way again. When she died, I thought all feeling had died with her; and so perhaps it might have done had *you* not come to wake it up again; to weep with and for me—to tell me I did not bear my grief alone—to teach me that to impart comfort is more blessed than to receive it. You raised me from the depths of despair—you urged me to action—you showed me that life can never be all barren whilst we have heaven in view. You nursed, not only my sick body back to health, but my sick soul to hope;—

and to you, Margarita,—to you whom our lost darling loved so truly—who will help me to keep her sacred memory green with tears—to you I would dedicate the little interest her early death has left me still in life. Do not shrink from me; you know I have not said a word that my dead love might not have listened to. For *her* sake, then,—to impart some comfort to the heart she has left so desolate, and some happiness, I trust, to your own life—be my wife, Margarita?'

'It seems so soon,' she sobbed, '*so soon!*'

'Does it really? I know, as we count time, it is but little more than ten months ago; but to me it seems an eternity! Oh, Margarita,' he said suddenly, 'I am a strange lover to woo any woman; but come to me—for God's sake come to me! and keep my heart from utterly breaking for the loss of *her*.'

'I *will* come, Laurence, whenever you think best.'

'Thank you, oh, thank you, so many times.

You are giving me so much, and I have so little to offer you in return. Oh, my lost darling,' he continued, with uplifted eyes, 'how can I give her more, when the best part of me is with you in your grave? Have I any right to bind her life to mine?'

'Hush, dear Laurence! All I ask is to be allowed to comfort you.'

'And you *will* comfort me. I shall no longer dread going back to London. You will come to me before long, Margarita?—I shall not be alone all the rest of my life—I shall have the sister of my angel!—*my* sister and nurse and friend—to help me along the weary road. Oh, Margarita, you don't know the blessing you will be to me.'

'I hope so,' she said, earnestly.

'You will infuse fresh energy, fresh hope, fresh feelings in me. The very thought seems to have raised me from death to life again. It has given me a new interest in living. My wife—my

wife! It is like balm poured on lacerated flesh to be able to say those words again. *My wife!* Margarita. Does it make you happy to hear me call you by that name?'

'Nothing in this world could make me happier,' she whispered.

'Have you ever dreamed of it, dear? Have you ever thought it might come to pass?'

'Not since she died, dear Laurence.'

'Not *since?* How could it be before? It was not—it could not have been—when *first* we met, Margarita!'

'Oh, Laurence! will you think the worse of me for saying it? I have *loved you all along.*'

He paused from sheer astonishment.

'*All along!*' he murmured. 'From those first few weeks. What have I done to deserve the love of two such women? And I—I was blind, engrossed in my own feelings, and saw nothing.'

'You were loving Daisy,' she replied, simply.

'How could you have been expected to think of me?'

As the drift of her answer caught his understanding, he turned and folded her in his arms.

'Dear, faithful soul,' he said, earnestly; 'generous, devoted spirit! May God deal with me as I fail to reward your loving, holy sacrifice of self!'

CHAPTER XI.

SIX YEARS AFTER.

IT was six years after. It was a dark night in November. I must take you to a house in Bayswater, within a stone's throw of Kensington Gardens.

* * * * *

All outside the house was gloomy and miserable enough. The town was enveloped in a dense fog, which, mingled with the raw atmosphere of winter, made as unwholesome a mixture as it was possible for human creatures to swallow. The crossing-sweepers were trembling and coughing at their posts, only longing for the moment when the fall of night should render it justifiable for them to strike work and return home. The

drivers of vehicles shouted to each other incessantly, as their warning lamps showed blurred and dimly through the thick white mist; and foot passengers hurried along with their wraps held up to their mouths, only anxious to reach their destinations as speedily as possible. Few people were out of doors who could possibly avoid it, and such as had left friends at home knew they were watching anxiously for their return. But the insides of most of the houses formed a striking contrast to the outside; and it it was especially so with the house which concerns this story. It was a commodious but moderately-sized building, close to the park, and, as a natural consequence, in the occupation of some man of property. The hall, which was brilliantly lighted and warmed, was covered with well-dressed skins; the drawing-room, which opened into a conservatory, was empty, but evidently made ready for company. From the open doors of the dining-room, servants were passing to and fro, carrying the stands of

flowers and ferns, and the dainty dessert dishes that decorate a dinner served *à la Russe*. There was a fourth room on the same floor, the only one which was occupied. It was a library or study. The walls were lined with book-cases and hung with paintings. Thick curtains shut out the windows, and two lamps lighted it almost as efficiently, and far more pleasantly than gas. The room was furnished with oak, much in the usual style, with one exception. It seemed to be a duplicate study. There were two writing-tables in it, two Cromwell chairs, and two sets of all the paraphernalia that authors most affect. There was a couch, too—a small couch covered with French chintz—a low table, upon which stood a work-basket, and a wicker stand of plants, all of which spoke of the occasional presence of a woman. But she was not there now. The only occupant of the room was a man—our old friend, Laurence Fane—who was bending over his paper

beneath the lamp-light, and writing as though his life depended on it.

Presently he stopped, thrust his hand through his hair—a trick of his whilst thinking—and raised his face to the light.

How like it was to the old face, and yet how changed. The look of care and depression had completely vanished. A few lines engraven by thought had become apparent on his forehead, but there was an expression of content over the whole countenance that made him seem younger than he had done before. He had grown stouter too, and bore that general air of well-doing that marks a man as being raised above the fear of penury or distress. His appearance was more healthy, his bearing more upright, his manner more confident, than they had ever been; in fact Laurence Fane was improved in every respect. He had reason to be grateful to the last six years.

He resumed his writing, scribbled off another

page or two, gathered the loose sheets together, and, rising, rung the bell.

It was answered by a man-servant.

'Is that boy still waiting, Carson?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Give him those papers, and this!' throwing a half-crown down on the table. 'Let him take them to the office in a cab. By the way, is your mistress in?'

'No, sir! The carriage has not yet returned.'

'That's strange! What time do we dine to-night.'

'Eight o'clock, sir. Same as usual.'

'All right. Send off those papers, and then see to my things. I shall dress at once.'

'Margarita will be late,' was the thought that flashed through his mind as he took out his watch and saw it pointed to seven. 'I wonder what can have kept her so long.'

Then he walked to the window and pulled aside the curtains and looked out upon the fog.

'Ugh! what a night,' he said, inwardly, 'I wish Margarita were at home.'

But she did not come home for half an hour afterwards. She came running upstairs at half-past seven o'clock, and burst into his dressing-room, a mass of black velvet and sable: 'My darling. Did you think I was lost for good and all!'

If the passing years had improved Laurence Fane in appearance they had done still more for his wife. Margarita at one-and-twenty had been a delicate, fair, sweet-faced girl. At seven-and-twenty she was a beautiful woman. Happiness and prosperity had developed her best points. Her face was rounder, her figure firmer, her hair more luxuriant than it had ever been. And she had style and fashion added to her beauty, and a modestly assured air about her, born of the bliss of loving and the knowledge that she was loved, that made her at times irresistibly fascinating. Her husband thought she looked so now, as she

came up to where he was standing before the looking-glass and laid her head upon his shoulder.

'You are very late, Margarita. You will never be dressed in time for dinner.'

'Oh yes, I shall. Ellen generally turns me off in about ten minutes. But I couldn't help it, Laurence, Miss Folkes wouldn't let me go.'

'You should have insisted on it. I don't like your being out in this fog. It makes me nervous.'

'You old goose. Nervous of what?'

'All kinds of things. Besides you might catch cold. You should take more care of yourself, Margarita.'

'Darling, you do coddle me up so. *Catch cold!* You know I'm as strong as a horse. But Miss Folkes had a most interesting case——.'

'I tell you what it is, my child. If you don't go and dress at once there'll be a most interesting case of seven people waiting for their dinner.'

'And only their tails to be found on the hearth-rug, like those of the celebrated Kilkenny

cats, when I go down into the drawing-room. All right, Laurence, I will not chatter any longer—only kiss me first.'

'Who's a goose now?' he said fondly, as he pressed his lips to hers. 'You shall tell me all about old mother Folkes and her case when they're gone, Margarita; but it really won't do to keep your guests waiting.'

And in another moment he heard her merry laugh in the next room.

'Not so *very late* after all, Mr Fane,' she said jestingly, as she entered the drawing-room at eight o'clock, and found him the only person there. 'You see, there is such a thing as a woman dressing herself quickly, though you won't believe it.'

'And looking very pretty when she is dressed,' he replied. 'Yes, I can quite believe that, Margarita. Well, now you can tell me all that you've been doing.'

'Oh, that is not much. First, I went to the

hospital (it is my hospital day you know); and then to Miss Folkes. But she interested me very much in a case——'

'Mr and Mrs Rawdon,' said the servant, throwing open the door.

'I'm doomed never to hear anything about that case of Miss Folkes',' said Laurence, in so comical a tone that Margarita met her friends with a broad smile upon her face.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DINNER PARTY.

HENRY RAWDON was a young American writer of great genius, who had lately come over to this country and received the warm welcome he deserved in exchange for his well-won laurels. His wife was a pretty, delicate creature, of the highest type of transatlantic beauty, with the fragility of a lily—the colouring of a blush rose—and the tongue of a magpie. The young couple had much commended themselves to Mr and Mrs Fane, who were contemplating a visit to the United States themselves before long, and it was not the first time they had joined their circle at dinner. Their entrance was soon followed by that of Mr and Miss Wellesley, a father and

daughter, the latter of whom had just appeared on the metropolitan boards and created a tremendous sensation. Miss Wellesley was very handsome and very clever—on the stage; but she had not much to say for herself in private life. However, her papa made up for her lack of garrulity, and as Laurence Fane had written the piece in which she was to make her second appearance, there were ample reasons why he and Mr Wellesley should button-hole each other in a corner of the room, and talk as if they were the dearest and most confidential friends in the world, whilst the lovely Venetia simpered and blushed under the string of searching inquiries put to her by Mrs Rawdon, and tried to look as if she were not the subject of conversation, and a beauty, and a 'lionne.' How often we have seen the same thing repeated. How well we know how it is done.

'I wonder where Jack and Cupid are,' exclaimed Fane, just as a thundering double knock came at the door.

'Talk of an angel and you hear the rustling of his wings,' he continued, laughingly, as Mr Arthur Hazleton, *alias* 'Cupid'—the smallest, the ugliest, and the cleverest man, with the biggest voice and the warmest heart in London—came bustling into the lighted room, followed by our old acquaintance, Jack Reeves, who was a standing dish at the Fanes' weekly dinners of eight.

'Are we late?' said Cupid, as he shook hands vigorously all round. 'I'm so sorry, it's all my fault, but I heard of this review in the "Antagonistic," Fane, and I couldn't resist bringing you a copy in case you hadn't seen it.'

He produced a paper as he spoke, and pointed out a most complimentary notice of a child's book that Margarita had lately produced. Fane read it through with a face glowing with pride.

'Dinner!' announced the servant at the open door.

'Dinner, dear Laurence,' said his wife, who was already on the arm of Mr Rawdon, warningly.

'Stop a minute. I am sure our friends will excuse me. You must hear this first. I am so glad, but it's just what I expected.' And he read the review aloud from beginning to end.

It was brimful of praise, and before he had concluded, poor Margarita's cheeks were dyed crimson with confusion.

'Oh, Laurence, how can you! and before Mr Rawdon, too. Please don't. It's horrible flattery, and you do make me feel so ashamed.'

'It's more than it makes me feel, then. I'm as proud as a peacock about it. But I knew what was in it before it went to press. Mrs Rawdon, will you forgive my egotism in having kept you waiting for a moment? But you must know—you, who take so much pride in Rawdon's success—what delight there is in finding that the work of those you care for is appreciated.'

'You talk as if you did not write yourself, Mr Fane,' she answered.

They had passed into the dining-room now,

and were out of ear-shot of Margarita, who, seated between Mr Rawdon and Cupid, was being subjected to a cross-fire of congratulation.

'Ah, mine is such totally different work,' he said. 'It's hard at times, of course, but then I settle myself to it. It's the business of my life. There is nothing wonderful in its being done, because I have nothing else to do. But to Margarita, who has her household and her child to attend to (and who attends to them most thoroughly), all these delicate, graceful fancies seem as natural as the course of her daily life. That is what seems so wonderful to me. She never studies. She only flits in and out of my library occasionally, and scribbles for a few minutes, and forthwith appear these wonderful children's books, and magazine articles, and scraps of poetry, all born of her imagination. It beats me altogether. I can't think how it's done!'

'Oh, Mr Fane,' exclaimed Miss Wellesley, 'to hear you talk, one would think you had no

imagination yourself. And what a run your last play had. And every one anticipates the new one will go all the season!'

'Purely mechanical, Miss Wellesley,' replied the dramatist, indifferently. 'You form an idea, plant a set of characters about it, construct a scenario, and there you are. They must fall into their places somehow. There's nothing new under the sun.'

'Well, papa thinks "The Fatal Impediment" most original. Don't you, papa?'

'Of course, my dear, in common with every one else. But success can afford to be modest. Our good friend has probably thought more of his work when it was worth less!'

'Ah, that's very likely,' said Fane, laughing; and then they fell to discussing other things, and the subject was dropped.

'Are we not to have Daisy to-night?' he inquired of his wife, as the dessert was placed on the table.

'Yes, certainly, Laurence, if you wish it. Carson, tell the nurse to bring down Miss Daisy!'

In a few more minutes the dining-room door was pompously thrown open, and a small figure, arrayed in blue and white, appeared upon the threshold. Fane's whole countenance lighted up with pleasure.

'Come, darling,' he said eagerly, 'come and sit on my knee.'

The little girl looked at the assembled party wistfully for a moment, and then ran into her father's arms.

'There's my daughter, Miss Wellesley,' he said, proudly, to the young actress, 'sole child and heiress of the house of Fane.'

'She's a very pretty little child,' said Miss Wellesley, as she stroked her golden curls, 'but I don't see much resemblance in her to Mrs Fane or yourself.'

'Don't you? She is generally considered like her mother. But it's rather a strange thing,

Miss Wellesley, that Daisy resembles my first wife more than she does my second. It's true they were cousins, and not unlike in feature, still the resemblance is remarkable. What shall papa give Daisy?' he continued to the child, 'one of those pretty crystallized pears, or a bunch of raisins.'

'Don't make her ill,' pleaded her mother from the other side of the table.

'I, darling? as if I would! You know I know much more about children than you do.'

'Or you think you do.'

'Isn't she saucy, Miss Wellesley? That's all upon the strength of that review. I wish I had never read it to her. I shall be subjected to this sort of thing for the next week at least.'

Miss Wellesley opened her eyes and believed it all, and Margarita called Laurence's attention to the fact that Daisy was destroying the decorations of the table.

'What is it? Oh, the flowers. Poor little dear; she misses the flowers so when she returns to London.'

'Has she been in the country?'

'Yes, she spends every summer down in Somersetshire with her mother's relatives, whilst Mrs Fane and I go abroad.'

'I play with George, and Maggie, and Rosie,' said the child in explanation.

'Her little cousins. There's quite a troop of children down there.'

'How are the George Wests getting on?' demanded Jack Reeves.

'Oh, very well. They have a large family, and George seems quite to have settled down to a farmer's life. The old man is getting very shaky. I don't think he has ever quite got over past events.'

'Perhaps not,' replied Jack, as he looked at his friend, and thought how well he seemed to have survived the awful battle of that time.

As Margarita, with the other ladies, rose from table to leave the room, she tried to coax Daisy to come into the drawing-room with her, but the child refused to quit her father's knee.

'Let her stay,' said Fane, pleadingly, as he looked up at his wife.

'Won't she bother you?'

He shook his head.

'If she does I'll ring for nurse.'

'Very well.'

So Miss Daisy was left in full possession.

'My baby is much fonder of her father than she is of me,' said Margarita, with a smile, as she joined her guests.

'Oh, dear! Do you like that?' asked Miss Wellesley.

'I don't mind it. Why should I? I would rather she preferred him to me, than love him less. And he does so dote on her. He spoils her dreadfully.'

'You are so fortunate in having only one,' remarked Mrs Rawdon, plaintively.

'Do you think so? I am very fond of little children. They are no trouble to me. I have been at the Children's Hospital this afternoon. Poor little things! It is so pitiful to see them suffer, and feel one is able to do so little for them. Have you ever been there?'

'Oh dear, no! Mr Rawdon wouldn't hear of my going to hospitals,' cried the pretty American. 'He would be so dreadfully afraid I should catch something!'

'I don't think there is much fear of that; besides, we run the risk every time we move out of doors. And there is so much want, and misery, and distress in London. It seems dreadful to live in the very midst and do nothing to relieve it.'

'Well, I wonder at you, Mrs Fane, who are so clever, and write such nice books and verses, caring to go amongst dirty people,' said Miss Wellesley.

'You think it would destroy all my romance perhaps. Indeed it does not. But then I am differently constituted from most London ladies, you know. I was brought up in the country, and amongst poor people, and when I married and came to live in town it seemed quite natural to go on visiting them. The only thing is I have so little time.'

'And Mr Fane approves of your doing so?' said Mrs Rawdon.

Margarita's face grew grave directly.

'If Mr Fane did not approve,' she answered—quietly, 'I should not do it. He and I have but one mind upon all subjects. We never think differently, or act in opposition to one another.'

At this juncture Miss Daisy reappeared to say good night, and create a diversion in her own favour, and her dismissal being shortly followed by the entrance of the gentlemen, a little general conversation, and a few songs from Cupid, terminated the proceedings of the evening.

As soon as she had dismissed her maid, Laurence Fane entered his wife's dressing-room.

'I haven't congratulated you yet on that review, my darling,' he said fondly, as he kissed her forehead.

'Oh, Laurence, dear, I am very glad, of course; but I am afraid it is more than I deserve.'

'Not a bit of it. The book is first-rate, and I told you so all along. But I wonder who can have written it?'

'I wonder, too. The "Antagonistic" is generally so bitter, and we have no friends on the staff.'

'That is what I'm so pleased about. If it had been got by favour it would have been worth nothing. It's the genuine reward of merit, Margarita. I feel so happy this evening, I should like to dance a break-down!'

'Dearest love, don't jump about in that extraordinary manner. Yes, I am very thankful,

but it is for *your* sake, Laurence—for your dear sake, to whom I owe it all.'

Her tone sobered him at once.

'How strange you should say that. When I have been thinking all the evening that I too owe everything to you.'

'To *me*, Laurence! Why—how?'

'To your love, my dear wife—your sympathy, your encouragement. When you came to me I was a broken-down man — broken in health, spirits, and fortune. You raised me from all this; you brought me hope and courage, and taught me patience and submission—and I took heart again and made myself what I am. But all through you, Margarita.'

'If so, you have repaid it a thousand times,' she answered through her tears.

'I look back upon what I was,' he continued, without heeding the interruption, 'without friends, or prospects, or connection; and I see myself now affluent—full of work, and rising

in popularity every day—and I owe it all to you, dear, all to you.'

'You would have risen, darling, through your own talents. I could but tell you to believe in them.'

'No! I never should have struggled up from the Slough of Despond into which I had sunk without your love to help me. It is love, Margarita, love and happiness, that have been my God-given helpers—that have turned this dark wilderness into a paradise, and made me feel there was something still worth living for. So, however much I may rejoice in my success, I must rejoice more in yours. This book will be a great success, Margarita. The Children's Hospital will have reason to rejoice that it was written.'

'I hope so. They want help, and it is so worthily bestowed. If you had only been with me there to-day, Laurence. This dismal weather outside, and the patient little faces

white with pain within. It was very touching!'

'I like you to help them and to write for them. Nothing could please me more. But I wish you wouldn't visit that and other places so often, Margarita. I don't think it is necessary, and I am afraid of its hurting you.'

'It will not hurt me, and it is a real pleasure. When one is so very, *very* happy,' she added in a low voice, 'one feels almost bound to do what one can to impart happiness to others.'

'My own wife! that is just like you. But you have our child to think of, Margarita.'

'Do you think I ever forget her? I never run the slightest risk for her sake. But it is for her sake too, and for the sake of our dear one who is gone, that I am so anxious, if possible, to give more comfort to those who need it as much as we once did. Can we ever forget that time, Laurence?'

'*Never*. Dear, loving Daisy! Her sweet,

innocent face rises before me as you speak. And yet, Margarita,' he continued thoughtfully, 'I sometimes question myself whether, had she lived, it would have been as well with me as it is now.'

'Oh! Laurence, of course it would have been. What was there to prevent it? My dear, dear Daisy. My darling girl. How I long sometimes to meet her again.'

'Do not long for anything just now, but to stay with me,' he said, trying to turn the current of her thoughts (for Margarita was still too apt to become melancholy when the subject of her dead cousin was introduced).

'Come, tell me all about Miss Folkes' case. You know how often my curiosity has been baulked this evening.'

'You humbug,' she replied, smiles breaking out over her face in a minute. 'You double-distilled humbug Laurence, when you don't care

one pin about the matter. However, you shall be punished. You shall hear the whole story from beginning to end.'

So saying, she settled herself on his knee and began.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS FOLKES' CASE.

'ONCE upon a time there was a poor little woman.——No, no,' said Margarita, suddenly correcting herself, 'This is no laughing matter, I mustn't joke about it. It is one of the saddest cases I ever heard. To cut a long matter short, Laurence, I went to Miss Folkes this afternoon about a family who are in great distress, and in whom we are mutually interested——'

'Whom you support between you, you mean!'

'No, Laurence; not so bad as that. Both the elder sisters go out to work now, and I think I have got a situation for the boy; but the father has rheumatic gout, you know, and the mother is

but a poor, weak, good-for-nothing creature. However, this is not to the point. I went to Miss Folkes to consult her about something, and found her quite upset. She had just come from the pauper lunatic asylum at ——, which is her parish, you know.'

'Good gracious, Margarita, are you going to add lunatics to your stock-in-trade for charitable purposes?'

'Hush, Laurence. Be quiet till you hear my story. Miss Folkes had not been to see a lunatic at all—how should she? but one of the nurses attached to the asylum. She had been told of this poor woman, who was dying rapidly of consumption, and, with her usual goodness, dear old thing, trotted off at once to see her. What was her surprise, Laurence, at finding that this pauper lunatic nurse is a gentlewoman—as much a gentlewoman as Miss Folkes or myself! It seems that through some embezzlement or swindling, Miss Parsons, that is her name, lost

all her money, and was reduced to earn her living, and you know how difficult that is in London. So when this post was offered to her she took it at once, and I think it was a noble thing to do. And she has been there more than ten years, Laurence, and has done her work so faithfully, that now she is dying the directors won't have her turned out. But she has barely the necessaries of life, and no comforts or companions, and Miss Folkes is so glad she has found her. She says to see the joy that lighted up poor Miss Parsons' face when she heard who she was, and for what purpose she had come, was beautiful. She said it was the only thing she had really hoped for—to speak to some kind woman of her own class before she died. And she couldn't find a kinder than Miss Folkes if she were to search the world round.'

'I think I know as good a one sitting on my knee. Well——?'

'Well, Laurence?'

'Go on with your story, my dear. Let us hear the end of it.'

'There is no end—I have told you all.'

'You have nothing more to say upon the subject? Oh, Margarita!'

'Well—you wouldn't mind, would you, Laurence, if *I* went to see her sometimes too?'

'I knew that was coming—you sly puss. To tell you the plain truth, then, Margarita, I would much rather you did not.'

'Don't say that! You can hardly realize what it is to me to think of a lady like myself being placed in such a position and to be unable to do anything to relieve it.'

'It is not the lady I object to, my dear, it is the place you must go to in order to visit her—a pauper lunatic asylum! Is it a fit place for my wife to be running in and out of?'

'And yet *she* has had to live and toil there for ten years.'

'That is her misfortune! I don't see why you should share it.'

'But she is dying, Laurence; Miss Folkes says she cannot last more than a few weeks longer.'

'All the less time for Miss Folkes to be troubled with her. Let her look after her own protégée.'

'She cannot see her every day. She has too many other duties,' replied Margarita, gently.

'Well! I suppose I must let you go, then, but I don't like it.'

'You dear boy! I knew you would come round to my way of thinking. And it's only twice a week, Laurence. Lady Hassell is going to share the work with us.'

'Well, if "the blessing of the poor maketh rich," you ought to be a wealthy woman, my darling. And when does this new labour begin. To-morrow?'

'Yes! I think I shall go to-morrow afternoon, in case Lady Hassell should have any engagement. But you shall not miss me, Laurence, I shall not leave home till you have gone to your club. And it is not time thrown away,' she added in a lower voice, 'it comes back, dearest, upon our child and ourselves.'

'You are right, Margarita. I know it does. Only don't you be carrying your philanthropic principles too far,' he added, laughing, 'and bring home a carriage-load of pauper lunatics to dinner. I don't relish the idea of a room full of guests, in blue ticking bed-gowns, with shaved heads, all sitting of a row opposite to me, and sticking out their tongues!'

'Oh, Laurence! how absurd you are,' cried Margarita, as much amused as he was; but though they talked no more about it that evening, he would not let the subject drop.

'Remember me kindly to all the lunatics,' he said, notwithstanding his wife's warning glance

as he handed her into the carriage the following afternoon. 'And don't bring home more than two at a time to dinner, because I may want occasionally to ask a friend of my own.'

Her happy face, beaming with loving reproof and pride as she looked back at him from the window, was the last thing he saw of her before he sauntered down to his club. He spent the afternoon there in company with men of letters like himself, and then found that he had overstayed the time he had intended, and hastened homewards in a cab.

The first thing he did on opening the hall door was to ask after his wife. It was the first thing he invariably did, even after the briefest separation. She was part of his existence. It seemed as though he only half lived while she was absent.

'My mistress has been back the best part of an hour,' was the servant's reply. 'She is in the library,' and there her husband found her ready

dressed for dinner, sitting over the fire with a book in her hand.

'Dreaming by the fire-light,' Fane said gaily, as he entered. 'Why, Margarita, your book cannot be very interesting—that is an uncut copy.'

She smiled faintly and turned the volume round in her hand. Her husband stooped and kissed her.

'You are cold, my child! and I am late, but I must have a warm before going up-stairs,' and he knelt on the hearth-rug and spread out his hands to the blaze.

'Well, what is your news. Did you see Miss Parkins, or whatever her name is?'

'O yes! I saw her.'

'Satisfactory interview?'

'As satisfactory as it could be under the circumstances.'

'Is she as ill as old mother Folkes made out?'

'Terribly ill!'

'And glad to see you?'

'Most thankful! Particularly for the things I took. She has so few comforts.'

'So you are glad you went?'

'Very glad!'— with a shudder.

'Why, Margarita, you are shivering. I hope you have not taken cold.'

'Not likely. I was well wrapped up.'

'You don't seem the thing to me. You are so silent too—so unlike yourself.'

'I think that must be your fancy,' she answered, but in so sad a tone as to be unmistakable.

'It's no fancy at all; it's self-evident. What has this woman been saying to you to put you out?'

'Nothing whatever. What should she say, but tell me of her poverty and distress and trouble? And that is nothing new to me, I see so much of it.'

'Too much, in my opinion,' muttered Fane, 'if

it is to affect you like this. Now, if it is not Miss Parsons, Margarita, what is it?'

'*Nothing*, my dear. I have told you before. Why do you worry me like this?'

'You have not been looking at any of those d——d lunatics?' he cried, forgetting himself.

Whether it was his voice, or his manner, or his words, he could not tell, but as the question passed his lips his wife threw up her arms suddenly and gave a shrill scream!

In a moment he was by her side.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

ANY sudden or violent emotion had always been, and especially of late years, such an unheard-of thing on the part of Margarita Fane that her husband was not only startled but alarmed. He threw his arms round her passionately, and entreated her to tell him what was the reason of her fear—what action on his part had raised, what thought on hers evoked it. But she would not answer. She only hid her face on his shoulder, and cried as if her heart would break.

And when her emotion had somewhat subsided, she withdrew from his embrace, and called herself weak and foolish, but she remained reticent as to the cause of the outburst. If it were to be

ascribed to anything but her own folly, she said it must be the effect of the weather.

'The weather, Margarita,' said Laurence, in a tone of disappointment, 'when has the weather ever affected you like this? It must be something more serious than a little fog or cold. Tell me the truth! Is there no other cause?'

'None that I know of, Laurence. Really, I did see some of those poor creatures to-day as I passed through the wards to Miss Parsons' rooms, and the sight of them may have engendered a few sad thoughts. But I should never be sad long, you know, dearest, in my own happy home!'

'I won't have you go there again,' replied Fane determinedly, as he rose to his feet. 'It is not a fit sight for you, as the sequel proves. I was against it from the first, and I'm sorry I gave in. Now, remember, Margarita, I won't have you go there again.'

'Very well, dear Laurence! It is time for

you to dress, isn't it? The first gong sounded long ago.'

'I am going. But mind what I say. You must give up visiting lunatic asylums once and for ever.'

She did not dispute his wishes, and he went to his own room.

The dinner that followed was an unusually dull and silent one. Not because the husband and wife were alone, for that was generally their merriest time, but because Margarita's eyes were still red and swollen, and Fane had fallen into a train of thought.

But when the meal was over and they retired to the drawing-room, with only their little child as witness, he drew her fondly to him, and laid her head upon his shoulder.

'Rest there, darling,' he said. 'Your nerves have been over-strung to-day, and you want repose. Daisy is happy with her Noah's ark upon the hearth-rug. Close your eyes, my

Margarita, and forget that you have any troubles.'

'I have none, dearest—whilst I am here. But oh, Laurence, if you had only been with me to-day.'

'I am glad I wasn't.'

'So am I, especially'—with a shudder. 'And to think poor Miss Parsons has lived amongst them for so long. I feel ashamed of my own weakness.'

'She has stronger nerves perhaps than you have.'

'I should hardly think so. She must have been a frail, weakly body, at the best of times. And I don't think I should mind them if I were accustomed to them. Only it was all so strange and new, and—and—horrible—to-day. And I thought I saw likenesses, and—it *chilled* me so.'

'It has thoroughly upset you. If I had known of this, I would have prevented your

going at all risks. You have heard me say, Margarita, *you must not go again.*'

'If you persist in that determination, Laurence, you will make me sink in my own estimation to the level of the greatest coward that ever lived. That poor creature who is dying, with probably half my strength of mind and body, tended them day and night. What am I that I should spare myself the sight of suffering? I, whom God has so abundantly blessed in my own life? Oh, don't say that I mustn't go again. I shall be stronger next time; you will see I shall; and be able to talk of everything I may have seen quietly. Do let me go, Laurence,' she continued, with feverish eagerness; 'I have a great —a most particular reason for wishing to go again.'

'We will discuss it to-morrow,' said her husband, wishing to change a subject which so excited her. 'Come here, baby, and kiss poor mamma's headache all away.'

He pulled the child upon his knee, and placed his other arm round her.

'Now I have got everything I care for in this world,' he said, affectionately. 'This child grows, Margarita. We shall have to leave off calling her "baby" soon.'

'She will be three years old next month,' she answered.

'How time flies! It seems like yesterday that she was born, and I nearly lost my precious girl. How like she is to poor Daisy. Her very mouth and eyes! If the poor little chap had lived, I fancy he would have been something like this.'

'We always thought him so like you, Laurence,' said his wife, with a deep sigh.

'Why that sigh, love? Jealous, because Daisy didn't take after my noble self!'

How much oftener she sighed for the past than he did!

'No, dearest! I wasn't thinking of that. She

is yours, and that is enough for me. I was thinking of—of—our poor dead girl. Can you remember her distinctly, Laurence?'

'Remember her, Margarita? What a question! Of course I can, every line of her sweet face. What makes you ask me?'

'I don't know. It was only a fancy. Because you so often mention the child's likeness to her, I suppose. Yet it was not in any way a remarkable face, Laurence—not one to be remembered anywhere. There was no distinctive feature about it.'

'I think it *was* one to be remembered anywhere by those who loved her,' he answered seriously. 'I never saw a prettier nor a sweeter one—except your own—my second Margarita. And you are wrong about her having no distinctive mark. Do you not remember the little brown mole under her chin, about which I used to tease her so, poor darling, and the blue mark on her forehead?'

'Where she hurt herself in falling on flints when a little child, and some of the stone dust got into the wound, and was never properly washed out again. Yes, I remember it well,' replied his wife, eagerly; 'but she wore her hair over the mark you know, so that it was not commonly seen.'

'She was a lovely creature,' said Fane reflectively. As he said the words he felt the woman by his side creep closer to him.

'But she was never so dear as you,' he continued, as he turned and embraced her.

* * * *

Two days after, Margarita's turn to visit the asylum came round again. She had recovered her usual spirits by this time, and persuaded her husband to let her fulfil the charitable duty she had undertaken.

So he let her go, though not without misgiving. To all appearance it was not realized. Margarita returned home in her usual spirits, with

a full description of all she had seen and heard, she talked volubly throughout dinner time, worked with him in his study all the evening, and retired to rest without having made any allusion to the nervous fears her first visit to Miss Parsons seemed to have engendered. On the contrary, her eyes were bright, and her cheeks flushed, and Laurence thought he had seldom seen her look handsomer than she did that night. But by the morning the excitement had faded, and she appeared pale and careworn. Fane noticed the change over the breakfast table, and advised her to keep at home. She seemed to acquiesce in his opinion, and he left her busy over the review of a newly published book. What was his surprise, then, on returning, to find that she had been out, and when he asked her where she had spent the afternoon, to hear her, after much hesitation and blushing, confess that she had again visited the pauper lunatic asylum of ——.

'Oh, come, Margarita,' he said in a tone of

vexation, 'this is altogether too bad. I cannot allow this kind of thing to go on. You'll be taking up your abode in this lunatic asylum next.'

She did not refute his assertion or attempt to gainsay it. She stood before him and trembled.

'I am very sorry, dear Laurence, very, very sorry, but I am interested in them, and——. But I won't go again until my turn comes. I won't indeed, I promise you, Laurence.'

'I hope you won't,' he said, in the same offended tone, as he turned on his heel. It was the most indifferent voice in which he had ever spoken to her.

But she only sat down in the room where he had left her, and gazed into the fire like a woman blinded or bewildered.

The next day was not a happy one for either of them. Margarita could not shake off the strange mood that seemed to have taken possession of her, and Laurence resented it by silence. The husband and wife, who had scarcely ever had a

difference in their married life before, were equally miserable.

The next time Margarita ordered her carriage early. Fane was waiting for her on the doorstep.

'Are you going to that cursed asylum?' he said brusquely.

'Yes, dear Laurence, if you don't mind.'

'Then I shall go with you;' and he prepared to follow her. But at the suggestion Margarita stopped short and looked up with a face of consternation.

'Oh, no! Pray don't! It is quite unnecessary. You cannot—you *shall not* come with me.'

'*Margarita!*'

His tone recalled her to herself. Down dropped her head.

'I mean—it is so unusual—the sight of these unfortunate people. You will think it so strange.'

'I shall go with you,' he repeated, firmly, as he followed her into the carriage.

Margarita sank back on the cushions, and hid her face in her hands.

'*What* is this you are keeping from me?' he said, sternly, as he observed the action.

'Nothing! How could I keep anything from you?' she answered in a low voice.

'Then what does this all mean? If you have no secret of which you are not ashamed, why should you object to your husband accompanying you on your errands of mercy?'

'I have no secret. I do not object,' she murmured.

'Margarita, there is something. It is of no use denying it. Your manner, your appearance, your spirits; everything goes to tell me so. Do you think I have no eyes? I have observed you narrowly for the last few days, and determined, if the secret lies with your visits to this asylum, to put a stop to them. Do you think I am going to have your health ruined, and the comfort of my

home upset, for the sake of a lot of wretched paupers?'

'Oh, Laurence, don't!'

'I shall find out if there is anything there which disturbs your mind, and if so, you've seen the last of it; and I am none the more disposed to view the matter leniently when I remember that it has been the cause of the first unpleasantness that has ever come between you and me.'

'Oh, my love!' she sobbed

'Come, Margarita! tell me what it is?'

'I cannot—indeed I cannot.'

'Then I shall find it out for myself.'

They said no more to one another till they reached the gates of the lunatic asylum.

CHAPTER XV.

A VISION FROM THE DEAD.

AS she heard the wheels of the carriage grate on the gravelled courtyard that surrounded the asylum, Margarita sat upright and made an effort to appear at her ease.

'Dear Laurence, please don't come in with me,' she said briskly, 'it makes me feel so foolish. I am all right now. I confess that I have been very weak the last few days, and permitted the merest trifles to take hold of my imagination, but I have made a resolution to shake it off, and it will be no credit unless I do it myself.'

'My dear, you speak too late. I have come thus far, and I intend to go through with it.'

'But it will seem so strange your entering the

asylum without any real cause. You have not the excuse that I have. And I should sink to the ground with shame were you to disclose your reason.'

'I shall not disclose it. I merely come in attendance on you.'

'I don't think they will let you pass through the wards,' she said with a kind of desperation.

'Then I shall not permit you to go alone.'

'Oh, Laurence! let me tell you the whole truth,' she cried suddenly. 'I saw—I fancied I saw—It was only because—only an idea—that made me remember——'

'You had better get out of the carriage,' he said curtly. 'You are talking the greatest nonsense that ever came out of a woman's mouth.'

She descended the steps as he spoke. He followed her. At the principal entrance they met Miss Folkes, who had also just arrived.

'Oh, my dear!' she exclaimed as she caught

sight of Margarita. 'I am so glad you are come. You will stay with me till it is over.'

'She is worse, then?'

'Going fast, my dear. They just sent me round a message to say so. She broke a large blood vessel in the night, and there is no strength to rally. The doctor has gone. He says he can't be of any use. But she is very peaceful—very sweet, so they tell me. How are you, Mr Fane? I didn't expect to see you here.'

'I came with my wife. I'm afraid these scenes are rather trying to her, Miss Folkes. I shall be glad when they are ended.'

'Does she upset you, my dear? She is so very quiet and happy. So unlike some death-beds we have witnessed together.'

'Indeed she does not. My husband is mistaken. He is over-anxious about me. But now that you are here there can be no necessity for his remaining. You will not be afraid to leave me with Miss Folkes, dear Laurence, will you? Take

the carriage, and I will return home with her.'

He did not answer, and Miss Folkes mistook his silence for acquiescence.

'Of course. That will be the best plan. Good-bye, Mr Fane, your wife is quite safe with me. Come, my dear! you have no time to lose.'

And she hurried Margarita away without giving her another opportunity of communicating with her husband.

Laurence stood where they had left him for a moment without moving, then he approached one of the officials.

'Can you tell me in which direction those two ladies have gone?'

'I don't know what part of the hospital they may be going to visit, sir.'

'They are going to see Miss Parsons, the nurse who is so ill.'

'Oh, then they must pass straight through the day wards.'

'May I follow them?'

'Are you a visitor, sir? Have you got an order to see the asylum?'

'None except this,' he answered, slipping some money into the man's hands; 'but I only want to see the wards through which the ladies pass on their way to the nurse's room.'

'Very good, sir. I'll take you through 'em, if you like to come with me,' replied the official, as he pocketed the coin, and turned up the long stone passage where Miss Folkes and Margarita had disappeared. Laurence Fane followed him in silence. As he walked along he kept his eyes open and looked carefully on every side, but he could neither see nor hear anything calculated to alarm the most timid mind. The building was large, cheerful, and airy; and, like most institutions under the charge of Government, faultlessly clean. The male ward, which they first entered, was more like a school-room for grown-up boys than any other place, but it was not devoid of

comfort. The long uncovered tables were strewn with books and papers; large well-protected stoves kept the temperature pleasantly warm; and a few prints upon the walls and plants in the window sills, gave it even an air of home. The patients, dressed in their uniform garb, were disposed in little groups about the room. Some were silently brooding over their real or fancied wrongs; others declaimed in a pompous manner for the benefit of any one who would listen to them, whilst a few of the more equal-minded played draughts and back-gammon, or read the books and papers, chiefly provided by private charity for their amusement. Laurence Fane examined them closely. There was not one violent or evilly-disposed looking patient amongst them. There was not even one face so ugly or repulsive as to haunt the most excitable temperament.

'They all appear very quiet and good,' he remarked.

'So they are, sir,' replied his cicerone, 'in this

ward. We keep the violent ones under lock and key. One or two of 'em may be a little down in the mouth, but t'aint to be expected it should be otherwise, poor critturs. My little girl, she runs in and out of the day wards, sir, as if they was her nursery. Hallo! Bob!' he continued, slapping a patient on the back, 'and wheer's Polly?'

'Hain't seen 'er to-day,' replied Bob, in a melancholy voice.

'Ah! well, she'll be a coming along by and by, never fear, and perhaps bring you a nice posy of "santhemums." This here gentleman came through to have a look at you, Bob.'

'Never seen 'im afore,' said Bob, despondingly.

'Come! that ain't the way to speak to a gennelman; rouse up, old fellow, and turn your face this way. Perhaps he's got a copper somwheers about him for a screw of baccy. What would you say to that?'

The poor creature's face lighted up immediately, and his exclamations of delight on receiving

a penny from Fane, attracted so much attention in the ward our hero soon found his stock of small change considerably decreased.

'Do you wish to go through the female ward, sir?' demanded his guide.

Everything about the asylum appeared to be so orderly and clean, and well-appointed, that he was about to answer 'No,' when a sudden instinct seized him, and he changed his mind.

'Yes, I wish to pass through every ward that the ladies passed through on their way to Miss Parsons' room.'

'Very good, sir. Please to step this way,' replied the man, and he preceded Laurence through another stone passage into a second room. This ward was ordered and furnished much the same as the first, but its inmates were all women. Such a chatter saluted Fane's ears as he found himself within its doors. It reminded him of a flock of magpies disputing over a field of grain. Some of them were working, some singing, some quarrel-

ling—and all talking. But the entrance of a stranger excited universal attention. Each woman left her occupation and came up to have a look at him. One pulled his hair, another examined his necktie, a third asked him to kiss her. The official had the greatest difficulty in keeping them at a distance. He pushed them about indiscriminately, but they cared no more for his rebuffs than if he were not present.

'Hands off, Katie. Leave the gennelman's scarf alone. She'll have your breast-pin, sir, as sure as a gun, if you don't look out. Now, Sarah, stand out of the way. I'll box your ears, Lucy, if you don't do as I tell you. What, can't you behave yerselves? Did you ever see ladies kiss a stranger and pull 'im about arter that fashion? I'll tell the governor of ye next time he comes round. Ah, here's the matron! She'll let yer know what's what, and pretty sharp too, if yer don't mind.'

The women shrunk back at the matron's ap-

proach, contenting themselves with making all sorts of insulting gestures behind her back, and Laurence Fane, who did not care about being examined in that promiscuous fashion, was not sorry when his assailants left him. He followed his guide through the day ward, and into a third passage, at the end of which was a door marked '*private.*'

'The ladies is in theer,' said the man in a whisper, 'along with poor Miss Parsons, who can't last through the day, so the doctor tells me. Law! she was a good 'un, sir; so patient and forbearing, and with such a power of quieting about her. The women's ward won't be the same place when she's gone. I can see the change in it already. There's one girl, poor Janie, a sweet pretty creature as ever you see. She was terrible bad when she first came here, some years ago, but Miss Parsons took her in hand, and made quite a pet of her, and now she ain't like the same woman. And I think the poor thing knows as her nurse is going, for she's been uncommon quiet, so the

matron tells me, since Miss Parsons took to 'er bed. We shall miss 'er, sir, that's certain; but lor! where's the use of thinking of it. It's always the best as goes first. Have you seen all you want, sir? Shall we go back again?'

'Certainly,' replied Fane, mechanically. He was musing, not on what the man had told him, but on what object in this orderly, well-regulated asylum could possibly have so agitated the even balance of Margarita's mind.

The female patients let him pass through their ward the second time unmolested. The eye of the matron was upon them.

But as the men approached the door of exit, they saw a slight figure sitting against it on the floor, and crouched in the attitude of listening. Her dress, like that of all her companions in misfortune, was made of blue and white striped ticking; her hair, cut short, was of a brown colour, plentifully mingled with grey, but her face was hidden.

As Laurence's guide caught sight of her he gave an exclamation of pity.

'Why, if here isn't my little Janie, all of a heap on the floor. Do you mind, she's a listening, sir? Poor creetur, that's for a voice she'll never hear again on earth. Get up, Janie,' he continued kindly, as he lifted the woman in his arms. 'You mustn't sit here, my dear. Some one will be a knocking of you as they opens the door.'

He turned her face towards his companion as he spoke.

Laurence Fane looked full at it.

As he did so, something—he could not tell what—seemed to strike upon his heart like a blow from an iron hand, and keep knocking there. His breath stopped, his head reeled, he staggered forwards and caught at the nearest wall for support. Then he gasped out painfully, and with an effort that entirely altered his voice,

'What—is—her—name?'

'Her name, sir,' replied the man, regarding

the stranger's extraordinary behaviour with some suspicion, as if he were not sure if he should not be in the asylum himself. 'Little Janie's name! Well, I am not quite sure if I can tell you. She's been in so many years, and I've never called her nothing but Janie, that I've clean forgot her other name. But if you particularly want to know, why I can ask the matron here.'

'I—do—want—to know!' repeated Fane in the same inexplicable manner, never taking his eyes off the lunatic's face.

'Mrs Manners! can you tell me what Janie's surname may be, without referring to the books. Here's a gentleman particular wants to know.'

'Jane Ellis, No. 83,' replied the matron with proud precision.

'And—when—did she—come here!' gasped Laurence Fane, whose face had become as pallid as death.

'When did she come here, Mrs Manners?' demanded the official, in whose arms the mad

woman was passively reclining, without apparently listening to anything that was passing around her.

'A matter of seven years ago: so Miss Parsons used to tell me. But you know I wasn't here then, Mr Goodman, and if the gentleman wants to know anythink more about her he'd better go straight to the Committee, who can give him hevery information hout of their books.'

'In course—but I don't suppose the gennelman *do* want to know more. You've never seen Janie afore, have you, sir ?'

He essayed to answer, but no words came to his relief. He approached the woman timidly, as though he wished to touch or examine her—but drew back suddenly—caught his breath, and hurried from the ward.

The official followed him wondering, but silent.

As they reached the open hall again, Fane turned round and grasped him by the arm.

'Tell me!' he said, almost fiercely, 'to whom must I go—to hear everything—*everything*.'

The man named one of the Board of Guardians who was most intimately acquainted with the affairs of the asylum.

The next moment the stranger had thrust a sovereign into his palm and rushed out into the open air.

CHAPTER XVI.

LAURENCE FANE DOES NOT RETURN HOME.

TWO hours later, Margarita Fane and Miss Folkes left the nurse's room with solemn faces. The 'fitful fever' was ended. Miss Parsons' earthly life, with all its troubles, disappointments, and privations, had ceased, and her spiritual life, with its perfected knowledge, its continual aspirations after something higher and better than it had ever known before, had commenced. The wasted body of the asylum nurse lay cold and motionless upon its humble pallet; but her freed spirit, tasting for the first time the joys of liberty, had already been carried to some happier sphere than ours, where it should first find the rest and then the progress it had been denied on earth.

Margarita and Miss Folkes, both of them spiritually-minded women, with eyes that had power occasionally to lift themselves from the contemplation of this frosty materialistic world to where, beyond the clouds which Ignorance and Wilfulness interpose between God and our fleshly vision, the Star of Immortality shines for those who believe, felt this truth from their hearts, and could not but rejoice at her departure. So, though their faces were serious, there were no tears in their eyes as they issued from the room which had been Miss Parsons'. The matron met them at the entrance of the ward.

'Is it all over, ma'am?' she said to Miss Folkes.

'Yes. She went almost a quarter of an hour ago. It is a happy release, Mrs Manners. We ought to be very thankful for her sake.'

'Dear heart, yes,' replied Mrs Manners, wiping her eye with a corner of her apron, 'but we shall miss her terribly in the wards all the same. I

can't think what poor Janie will do without her. She's been moaning to herself in a corner all day. I am sure she feels something has happened.'

'Which is Janie?' inquired Miss Folkes, interested.

'This one, ma'am, crouching by the stove. I wish you or the lady here would speak a word of comfort to her. Perhaps she'd listen to you.'

'What are you thinking of, my poor girl?' said Miss Folkes, kindly touching her on the shoulder. 'What do you want?'

The woman raised her wasted face, and stared with large, wide open blue eyes at the stranger.

'I want her!' she answered, in a melancholy voice.

'Your nurse, you mean! She can't come to you just now, Janie, because the good God who lives in heaven wants her to do some work for Him, but you will see her again some day.'

'*When?*' demanded the mad girl, eagerly.

'Very soon perhaps. I cannot tell you the exact time, but God knows it, and He will not keep you waiting any longer than is necessary. Do you understand what I say?'

But the lunatic had turned again to the stove, and did not appear to be listening.

'Come here, Margarita,' said Miss Folkes, 'and try what you can do with the poor thing? You are more of her own age. She may take a fancy to you!'

Mrs Fane advanced slowly. She had been talking to a little knot of women at the other end of the ward. As she caught sight of the kneeling figure she started backwards.

'*My God!*' she said, solemnly, beneath her breath.

'What is it, my dear?'

'That is the same woman—the woman I mentioned to you, Miss Folkes, who reminds me so powerfully of——'

'My poor dear! it must be terribly painful.

I am sorry I should have subjected you to this again. Perhaps we had better go. Your nerves have been sufficiently tried for to-day.'

'No, no! I *will* speak to her. It is only my fancy. She is not really like my lost darling. She cannot be. But there is a look—an expression—and it haunts me!'

She walked up to the woman bravely and knelt by her side.

'Poor Janie. I wish I could comfort you—if only for the sake of your likeness to my sweet Daisy.'

The girl turned and confronted her. Margarita began to tremble.

'I cannot stand it,' she uttered faintly, and tried to rise; but the woman would not let her go. Suddenly she threw her arms around her and held her fast, saying in a rapid whisper, 'Take me away—take me away—take me away—take me to her—to her—she was so kind—she

was so kind—she was so kind—take me away—take me away!'

She threw back her head as she spoke, and something in the action seemed to appal Margarita. She wrenched herself by force from her embrace, and stood at a little distance, pointing at Janie's upturned chin.

'Do you see it?' she exclaimed wildly, 'there—there, it is another point of resemblance between them. Oh,' she went on with passionate energy, 'if I didn't know my darling was lying at the bottom of the sea, I should have thought she knelt there—that she knelt there. Let us go home, Miss Folkes, *pray* let us go home, I feel as if I couldn't stand this a moment longer.'

'We shall return again shortly, there is no doubt,' whispered Miss Folkes to the matron in excuse for their hurried departure; 'but the fact is, my friend has lost a very dear relation, of whom poor Janie reminds her too powerfully, and she

cannot stand it at first. She will become more reconciled to the likeness by-and-by.'

'Well, I've heard many a visitor say Janie looked for all the world like a real lady,' replied Mrs Manners with some pride, 'which indeed she may be, for aught we know to the contrary, for there's all sorts come in here from time to time. It's only lack of money or friends that brings 'em, ma'am, and that's a misfortune which the Lord won't charge to any of us.' And curtseying low for the fee placed in her hand, the matron let the ladies take their departure without further parley. Miss Folkes did not speak to Margarita till they had reached the open air. Then, to their surprise, they found the carriage was still waiting for them; and they proposed of course to drive home together.

'How did your master leave here?' demanded Mrs Fane of the footman, who held open the carriage door for her; 'in a cab?'

'I don't know, ma'am. I didn't see him, for master ordered the coachman to put up for an hour, and followed you into the building.'

Margarita started at that intelligence but did not remark on it.

'O! very well! Drive to Miss Folkes' first and then home.'

As soon as she found herself alone with her friend she relapsed into a fit of weeping, and as soon as she had sufficiently recovered from it, Miss Folkes took the opportunity to draw from her the full account of the little difference she had had with her husband, and its cause.

'My dear,' she said reprovingly, 'you must tell him all about it directly you reach home. Such a foolish thing to keep secret. What with the mystery and your low spirits, no wonder Mr Fane is angry.'

'But I don't like to tell him! I am so afraid of wounding his feelings. She was his first love —Miss Folkes;—it was months after her death

before he could even mention her name without emotion, and I tremble to think what effect it might have upon him to see this poor girl.'

'I cannot think he would desire to see her.'

'O yes, he would. You do not know him. The very fact that he dreaded to see her would make him do it. Laurence is so strong-minded; so contemptuous of anything like moral cowardice. And if he did——'

'Well, and if he did?'

'It would revive the bitter past so terribly. It would throw all his thoughts back to that happy period when Daisy was alive, and with him, and—Miss Folkes, you do not know how much he loved her.'

'And you are jealous, even of the dead! I did not think it of you, Margarita.'

'Jealous, of my precious Daisy; of my dear girl? Oh, no; I hope not—*I hope not.* I believe —I am almost sure, that were she to come back

from her grave, even now I could give him up to her, and still have room for thankfulness—for peace.'

'Then why be so fearful of mentioning a woman who resembles her, to him?'

'It is not she. It is not my Daisy. I should evoke all his tenderest remembrances, his keenest regrets, without the consolation of receiving back my darling girl. Oh, Miss Folkes! If it were *she*, if it were *she*.'

'Thank God, it is not.'

'I can't say that. I cannot even feel it, I loved her so. I have loved but one thing better in this world,' she added in a lower key, 'and that is *her husband*. And my love for him has been doubled by the knowledge I was consoling him for the loss of *her*.'

'And yet you fear to take him into your confidence.'

'Only for his own sake.'

'Has not your condition and the secrecy you

have maintained towards him wounded him ten times more than any reminiscences could do? Come, Margarita, be reasonable, be more like yourself, and resolve whatever comes of it, to tell Mr Fane what has so much disturbed you lately.'

'If you think it best, I will.'

'Of course I think it best. Anything is better than misunderstanding between people who love each other. Promise me you will tell him this evening?'

'I do promise.'

'Thank you, my child. And I hope he will prevent your going to the asylum again. You can do no good there now, and you have too much practical work waiting you to be able to afford to waste any time on a sentimental remembrance.'

She kissed Margarita affectionately as they parted, and the wife returned home, with a firm resolution to do as she had been counselled.

Had Laurence been in the house she would have made a clean breast to him at once. She

was just in the mood to tell him everything, and implore his forgiveness for the trouble she had caused him. But although it was close upon their dinner hour he had not yet returned.

She changed her dress, and carried her little girl down with her into the drawing-room to beguile the time till her father's return. But the second gong sounded and still there were no signs of his approach.

'Will you wait dinner for my master any longer, madam?' inquired the servant, when another half-hour had slipped away.

'Oh yes! I think so. Mr Fane cannot be much longer now. It is impossible.'

She opened the pianoforte and played a lively set of quadrilles, whilst Daisy pirouetted round the room holding her doll by the arms. Presently the nurse appeared at the door.

'It's half-past eight, ma'am. Miss Daisy should be in bed.'

'I want to wait to see papa,' urged the child.

'Papa has not come home yet, dear baby. You must see him to-morrow morning. Give mamma a kiss, and go with nurse like a good girl.'

'Master is late to-night, ma'am,' observed the nurse, as she captured her unwilling charge.

'Very late! I can't imagine what is the matter. I thought he would have been home long ago. Tell Carson he had better serve the dinner. It's no use waiting any longer.'

She went through the meal in a mechanical melancholy manner, sitting in solitary grandeur at the head of an empty table, with a speechless attendant standing behind her chair.

'Can anything be the matter?' she exclaimed suddenly, as the dinner came to a close.

The decorous and highly respectable Carson, who knew his place as well as any servant as was ever bred, almost committed the impropriety of jumping as his mistress took him into her confidence after this fashion.

'The matter, madam,' he stammered, 'I should think not. Mr Fane has probably been detained at his club, or—or—he may have met with friends, madam—or—or——'

'But he never does any of these things without letting me know first, Carson,' she answered fretfully, 'and it is so strange, so unaccountable.' At this moment a sharp double knock sounded at the hall door, and the next, a telegram in its official yellow envelope was delivered to her. She tore it open, and read the enclosure with a pallid face.

'Your master will not be home to-night, Carson,' she said with trembling lips, 'he—he has met with friends, as you suggested. Tell them I shall not require coffee served in the drawing-room. I am tired! I shall go straight to bed.'

'Shall Fisher send it up to your own room, madam?' demanded Carson, who was vexed to see his young mistress so disturbed.

'No! I want nothing now,' she answered, as she rose from the table.

She left the telegram lying on the floor. When she had disappeared Carson picked it up, and read it—

'*I cannot return to-night. I have business to transact which requires my presence.*'

That was all!

was so kind—she was so kind—take me away—take me away!'

She threw back her head as she spoke, and something in the action seemed to appal Margarita. She wrenched herself by force from her embrace, and stood at a little distance, pointing at Janie's upturned chin.

'Do you see it?' she exclaimed wildly, 'there—there, it is another point of resemblance between them. Oh,' she went on with passionate energy, 'if I didn't know my darling was lying at the bottom of the sea, I should have thought she knelt there—that she knelt there. Let us go home, Miss Folkes, *pray* let us go home, I feel as if I couldn't stand this a moment longer.'

'We shall return again shortly, there is no doubt,' whispered Miss Folkes to the matron in excuse for their hurried departure; 'but the fact is, my friend has lost a very dear relation, of whom poor Janie reminds her too powerfully, and she

cannot stand it at first. She will become more reconciled to the likeness by-and-by.'

'Well, I've heard many a visitor say Janie looked for all the world like a real lady,' replied Mrs Manners with some pride, 'which indeed she may be, for aught we know to the contrary, for there's all sorts come in here from time to time. It's only lack of money or friends that brings 'em, ma'am, and that's a misfortune which the Lord won't charge to any of us.' And curtseying low for the fee placed in her hand, the matron let the ladies take their departure without further parley. Miss Folkes did not speak to Margarita till they had reached the open air. Then, to their surprise, they found the carriage was still waiting for them; and they proposed of course to drive home together.

'How did your master leave here?' demanded Mrs Fane of the footman, who held open the carriage door for her; 'in a cab?'

who has been lost for some time, that the shock almost deprived me of my usual powers of judgment.'

'I can understand it, sir, but I cannot help you any further. This is public business, which I have no means of pursuing except in a public manner.'

'I only want to learn her antecedents—how she came there—who knows her—what is her real name?'

'I should not be able to tell you without referring to the hospital books, which are kept at the hospital itself.'

'Then will you give me a line to any one who can, Mr Dunman? I shall go mad myself if this mystery is not solved. You do not—you cannot—know the importance it is to me.'

'You seem to take a great interest in this woman,' said Mr Dunman, eyeing his visitor keenly.

Laurence Fane groaned.

'Give me the order. That is all I ask for. By heavens! you *shall* give it me. I will not leave this house without it.'

He looked so dangerous as he spoke that Mr Dunman pulled out pen, ink, and paper without further preface, and wrote the necessary document. Fane seized it, and, with some incoherent acknowledgments, left the room. Mr Dunman looked after him wonderingly.

'Queer chap,' he thought to himself, and not without a sensation of gratitude at having got rid of him so easily. 'If he had asked for an order for his own admittance it would have been more to the purpose. Jones,' he continued pompously to the servant who had just closed the hall door. 'Mind, if that gentleman ever calls here again, you will say I am not at home, Jones, not at home. Though I believe if he wanted anything he would force himself into the library and sit there till I returned,' he added for his own benefit.

Meanwhile our poor hero, bathed in perspiration, notwithstanding the temperature, rushed back to the lunatic asylum. The person to whom he had been directed was the secretary in charge of the books. All the particulars he could give referring to the patient No. 83 were, that her name was Jane Ellis, and that being insane and chargeable to the parish, she had been admitted to the asylum some seven years before, and never shown any signs of recovery since.

'But I want to know something of her previous history. Who brought her here, and under what circumstances?'

'That I cannot tell you, sir, except that she was transferred from the workhouse to this asylum. Any pauper belonging to the parish whose insanity is attested is admissible. I find that Jane Ellis is entered under the remarks "married woman, no friends, husband not to be found, age supposed to be about twenty." You'll get no

further information from the workhouse than that.'

'But has no one ever been to see her?'

'Not that I am aware of.'

'Are you speaking of Janie, sir?' inquired the official with whom Fane had inspected the asylum, and who, interested in the conversation, was lingering near.

'Yes! Do you know if she has any friends?

'There's an old woman, sir, Meg Brandrip, who comes to see her every Sunday afternoon; but I never heard she was a relation.'

'Oh! where is she? Can't you give me her address?' cried Fane, eagerly.

'I dare say I can find it for you, that is, if you'll just wait a bit,' said the man, as he turned on his heel, leaving his hearer to suffer the acutest suspense till he should appear again.

'The matron knows nothing of Mother Brandrip out of the asylum,' he said on his return, 'but there's a lad here as once carried a parcel home

for her, and he says she lives at No. 24, Virgin's Court, Bloomsbury. I can't vouch for his being right, you know, sir, but still he says so, and t'aint so far if you've a mind to try.'

It seemed his only resource, and he hastened to try it. This time he walked. His nerves were strung up to that pitch of excitement, that he could not bear the inaction of driving. His blood was at fever-heat, and he felt that he could take no rest again until the fearful mystery that oppressed his soul was solved. In after days he could not describe, nor even remember, how he had felt during that awful period of suspense. He only knew that he had walked and talked—much like other men—whilst his body was alternately cold and hot, and his brain was in a state of confusion which he was utterly unable to separate or to interpret into either happiness or misery.

It took him half-an-hour to reach Virgin's Court, although he had walked as if it had been

for a wager. With some difficulty he found No. 24: a filthy-looking domicile, with patched and papered windows, but he could gain no entrance — the door was locked — Mrs Brandrip was evidently not at home. Laurence Fane stood there and cursed at his ill luck, whilst a group of dirty children, but too well used to cursing, stood and stared at him.

'She's hout,' remarked one of them presently.

'Do you know where? Could you fetch her for me?'

'I'd try. Mebbe, she's round the corner!'

'Or at the baker's,' cried another. 'I seed her there ten minutes ago.'

'Go and find her, and I'll give you each a shilling,' said Fane, impatiently.

The ragged little beggars ran off in different directions, whilst he fumed up and down in front of the dirty house, and women, in sundry states of deshabille, leaned out of the opposite windows and commented on his behaviour. Presently the

children returned, with an old crone tottering after them. Fane scrutinized her countenance, and immediately recognized it. She was the old woman who had clutched his arm at the moment when the unfortunate 'Queen of the Wave' had reached her highest peril, and been ultimately brought to shore in the same boat as himself. As soon as he saw her, the recollection of her lamentations over the loss of Jane Ellis floated across his memory, and a hope sprang up in his heart that all that he had seen and imagined that day might prove an illusion, and the patient who called herself by that name be what she professed to be.

'Are you Mrs Brandrip?' he demanded.

'Yes, sir, at your service. I didn't think no one would be a wanting of me to-day, or I shouldn't have gone from home,' she answered, as she fumbled with trembling hands at the fastening of her door. Laurence Fane threw the money he had promised to the children and followed her.

'I have come to see you on very important business,' he commenced, as soon as they were alone. 'Do you remember me, Mrs Brandrip? Have you ever seen me before?'

'No, for sure, sir,' answered the woman, shading her bleared eyes to look at him.

'Were you not one of the emigrants wrecked in the "Queen of the Wave," some seven years ago?'

'La! yes, for sure, sir, and a terrible business that was. We was bound for Australy, my man and two boys and myself, and the Lord took 'em all at one blow and left me here to get on as I best might.'

'I was with you in the boat that brought us to shore, Mrs Brandrip.'

'La, now, and were you? Never, for sure. But my eyes are getting very dim, sir, and I can't see as I used to do.'

'You don't remember me at all, then?'

'I don't, sir, and that's the truth, and I hope

you won't be offended. But there! what a time it was to be thinking of anything but our own sins, and the place we was a-going to.'

'Yet I remember you. You used to talk a good deal of one Jane Ellis.'

'For sure, and she was saved, sir. Praise the Lord; but la! such a wreck. If her poor father could have seen 'er, he'd a died of grief. I had promised old John Green on his death-bed as I'd look after his gal a-board ship, for she was a fine gal and flighty, though a going to find her 'usband in Australy, which he's never bin heard of since neither. And then, what with the sickness and the trouble I clean forgot it till we was all agoing to the bottom, and then it lay terrible on me, sir. And I dare say I talked a bit of her. She never came to land, sir, for a whole month after me, and then when I heerd she'd been restored along with others I went down to see her; and there she was raving-like and quite out of her senses.

I couldn't understand the like of it, for though I'd never seen 'er often, her poor father had always talked to me of her being so sensible and 'cute like. But they told me that as she was being a lowered into the boat, a burning bit of wood, sir, one of them nasty spars or summat, hit her on the 'ed and knocked her back senseless, and when she came to she was ravin', and she's never bin no better. She's in the lunatic asylum, sir, at ——. I often goes to see her, poor gal, and take her a flower or a bit of cake, but she never knows me, in course, and it isn't to be expected, considerin' we never met before she was cracked.'

He had listened to this long harangue in patient silence. Now he felt he must speak.

'Mrs Brandrip, it is about Jane Ellis I want to question you. I saw her this afternoon. There were several women came on shore in that boat, you remember. Are you sure the one in the asylum is Jane Ellis?'

'La, sir! to be sure.'

'You had never seen her—how did you recognize her?'

'She had on her own clothes, inscribed with her full name. Besides, sir, the agents' gentleman had a list of all the emigrants in the "Queen of the Wave," and so had Benjamin Swain, who was with 'em in the boat, and this poor creature corresponded with their description and hevery think. Oh yes, sir, it's Jane Ellis: there's no call to doubt it. And it would have been much wiser if the Lord had saved my poor man, who could have worked for a bit of bread for me, instead of a senseless woman who ain't no use to nobody.'

'Hush, hush,' said Fane. Her irreverence jarred upon his feelings. 'Tell me all you know about it. Did the man Swain swear this woman was Jane Ellis?'

'La, sir, he'd no call to swear, and how should he know? But all I heard I heard from him.'

'Where is he to be found, then?'

'He used to be about the docks; but he's down Greenwich way now, sir. He's been tried terrible with the rheumatics lately, poor dear.'

'Can you give me his address?'

'That I can't, sir; but they'll tell you at the 'orsepital. I think he bides along of his son-in-law, the boat-builder; but he's well known, is Benjamin Swain. Any one will tell you where to find him.'

'Then you can tell me nothing more?'

'I've told all I know, sir. And if you could give the poor gal a little comfort now and then for the sake of them as is gone, sir, 'twould be a rale charity, that it would.'

He muttered something in reply as he rewarded the old woman far above her highest expectations, and passed out once more into the now dusky street.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SAILOR'S TESTIMONY.

WHEN Laurence Fane stood once more outside the foul precincts of Virgin's Court, he stopped for a moment and considered what he should do next. It was too late to think of going down to Greenwich that night, and *he could not go home.*

As he thought of Margarita's trusting face, and his child's innocent smiles, a fierce feeling almost of antipathy to everything which complicated his present position seemed to rise up within him, and he felt he could pass the night anywhere but with those who were familiar with his past and his present, but had no knowledge of the fearful bridge which connected them in his mind. So he sent

his wife a telegram to say that business detained him where he was, and he should not return that night. And then he went and spent the long, miserable hours at a neighbouring hotel, walking up and down the room provided for him, and trying by the most illogical of arguments to convince himself that he was on a wild-goose chase, that his fears were utterly unfounded, and that he should live to laugh at the folly that now possessed him; yet the mad woman's face, that one vacuous gaze she gave him, out of wide-open blue eyes, haunted him all night long. He put out the light, but it stared at him through the darkness with melancholy reproach, till, what with regret and uncertainty and fear combined, he felt as though he were going wild.

As soon as ever it was possible the following morning he went down to Greenwich, and found, as Meg Brandrip had assured him, no difficulty in tracing the whereabouts of Benjamin Swain. The boat-building son-in-law, who was working

in his yard by the river-side, received him with courtesy, and conducted him at once into the presence of the old sailor.

'You'll find the old gentleman mortal bad, sir. He hasn't moved out of his arm cheer for the last twelve months, but he keeps up his speerits, he do, and allays glad to see an old friend. Here, govnor,' he continued by way of introduction, 'here's a gentleman as know'd you a few years ago come to have a spell o' talk. It'll cheer ye up a bit to see him, won't it now?'

'I dessay it will, Bill. I dessay it will, though I can't say as I remembers the gentleman's face,' said old Swain, who was completely crippled by rheumatic gout.

'I was in the "Queen of the Wave" when she burnt,' replied Fane slowly. 'You commanded the long-boat, which was driven out to sea, and picked up by a Spanish vessel, and a month afterwards you came home by Calais

with the rest of the passengers and crew, and I came to meet you at Dover, and spoke to you.'

'Lor bless you, sir—in course you did—and you had a sad loss—I remember that too, and it's often I thought on it since,' said the old sailor, drawing his cuff across his eyes. 'A pretty dear, and to go the bottom, like that, with her baby and all. Well! I hope the Lord's been good to you, sir, and you've got another maybe by this time, and little uns a growing up about your knee—I hope you have.'

'Thank you, my friend,' returned Fane. (They were alone by this time.) 'As it happens, I've come down here expressly to talk to you about that sad time. Swain! I am very unhappy about my poor wife. I cannot feel quite certain that she died.'

'Not certain!' exclaimed Swain, with surprise,—'Lor bless you, sir! what *could* be more

certain? I saw her die, pretty dear, with these two eyes.'

'But are you sure the woman you saw die was my wife? You took her from my arms in the dead of night, wrapped in a blanket. You told me you never saw her face. In the confusion and the hurry may you not have mistaken another person for her?'

'Why, sir, you puts me all in a flurry. How could that be? It's true I finds myself the next morning in a boat full of men and women, who was mostly strangers to me, and that they was too sick, and tearful, and troubled-like, poor things, to talk or tell their names; but you know which of 'em came ashore, sir. You saw the correct list of 'em, and your poor lady wasn't amongst 'em, was she, now?'

'No! no! of course not. But there were one or two who could not answer for themselves. There was one called Jane Ellis, for instance, what became of her?'

'Well, now, that's strange that you should mention Jane Ellis,' said the old sailor, with a look of intelligence, 'because she is about the only one I've seen since of all of 'em. She was a pretty creetur, sir, as ever you see, but she came by an accident on board the boat, and she never had her senses after. She's in the lunatic asylum at ——'

'How did she lose her senses?'

'Well! I opine it happened arter this fashion,' replied Swain solemnly. 'I see 'er the next morning a lying in her night-dress like a dead thing, and when I asked how it came about, the others told me that she had been hit on the head by a falling spar directly after I'd put her in the boat the night afore and hadn't moved since. And no more did she move till arter she was aboard the Spanisher, and then she talked the same nonsense she's done ever since.'

'But how did you know she was Jane Ellis?'

'I don't know how I'm to answer you that

question, sir. It never struck me afore. But her clothes was marked with the name, if I remember right, when she came ashore.'

'You said just now she was in her night-dress.'

'So she wor, sir, at first. So most of 'em wor, but some of the women had their bundles in their hands and I suppose this poor gal had hers.'

'Then the women may have dressed her in the clothes that lay nearest to her, without knowing if they were her own or not,' said Fane excitedly.

'Very like, sir.'

'Swain! you must tell me more. What was the woman like—who died—whom you believe to have been my wife?'

'Fair—and delicate-looking, sir—tall, I should say, when standing—blue eyes or grey eyes—something of that mixture—and rather spare about the body.'

'But my wife was not "spare." She was very plump.'

'She may have been when she was put into the boat, sir, but you don't know how a few days' anxiety and starvation pulls down a creature. She was spare enough when she died, poor thing, that I'll take my oath on.' Fane groaned aloud.

'I *must* know more; I *must* have some better ground to go on, Swain! I was in the lunatic asylum at —— yesterday—and I do not believe the woman they have there is Jane Ellis.'

Swain looked at the speaker in the most utter amazement.

'Not Jane Ellis, sir! Who should she be then?'

'I cannot tell for certain. But I believe—I think—I do not know what to think—I am half mad myself with doubt and uncertainty. Swain, was there nothing—nothing on this woman by which she might have been recognized? What became of her night-dress? Had she no rings on her fingers?'

'I don't know what became of the night-gown,

sir, but she had a ring or two, if I remember rightly. She is a married woman, you know, sir, and she wore her wedding ring, poor creetur, and another a top of it.'

'Yes, yes; what was that like?' exclaimed his hearer impatiently.

'Well, I don't know as I can describe it properly, but it was a twisty one, and I think it had coloured stones or summat coloured on it, but I ain't sure.'

'Who has it?'

'I suppose Jane has it herself. She took it along with her to the asylum. But perhaps they took it from her for her keep. I can't say. It may be the rules. But you could inquire, sir.'

'And this is all—positively all?'

'That's all, sir, and if it ain't satisfactory I'm sorry for it. But there ain't no question in my own mind but that your poor lady was lost, seeing I lowered her body into the water myself; and there she was, in her night-gown, dressed just I

suppose as you give her to me, with a red hankercher knotted round her throat.'

'My wife had no handkerchief round her throat,' interposed Fane quickly.

'Ah, then, I suppose some kind creetur lent it her afterwards. But she looked very peaceful and happy, sir, as if all her trouble were ended; and I hope when it please the Lord to call you and me home that we'll be found as fit for heaven, as I'm sure she was.'

'Amen,' said Fane. He was silent for a moment, and then he rose.

'Thank you, Swain, for all you have told me. I shall go back to London now.'

'I hope you won't let it distress you afresh, sir. Why, it must be nigh upon seven years ago now. Too long a time for fretting, though I've never been to sea since that day. It regular laid me up.'

He shook hands with the old sailor and retraced his steps. He had one more object in

view now; if possible, to see the ring which Jane Ellis was said to have worn above her wedding ring. A pauper emigrant with a guard ring! The idea was absurd. And knocking at his heart meanwhile, was the recollection of another ring —a mere trifle with A. E. I. traced in blue enamel on it—which he had given to Daisy on the last Christmas Day which they had spent together.

Arrived in town, his destination was once more the lunatic asylum. As he walked there, his agitation became so extreme that he was fearful of betraying it. He could feel the trembling of his limbs, the nervous chattering of his teeth, and fought like a lion against the rising emotion.

'I must be calm—I must be calm'—he kept on repeating to himself as he thought of what lay before him. When he reached the asylum, he asked at once to see the matron, and his order of admission gained him ready access to the

female ward. Of course, the object of his former visit had found its way to Mrs Manners' ears, and the report that 'Janie had been recognized as a long lost friend, a relation of a real lady and gentleman,' was already current through the establishment.

As Fane entered the ward, the matron approached him, smiling and communicative.

'Janie's very lively this morning, sir. She's got over her nurse's absence much better than I thought she would; and she's been amusing herself all day with her "doll," as we call it,' and she pointed to where the mad girl sat on the floor, rocking backwards and forwards a bundle of rags, and crooning to it as though it were a child.

Fane's blood curdled as he looked at her. The position, the action, above all, the soft low voice, recalled so powerfully and so painfully a scene which he had witnessed but too often.

'Don't, don't,' he said faintly with his hands

pressed upon his eyes. 'Take her away; I cannot look at her.'

'Lor! and we think she looks so natural a nursing of it,' replied the matron, rather affrontedly. 'But what business do you please to have with me this morning, sir?'

'I think, I fancy,' he stammered, 'that I have seen Jane Ellis somewhere before. She is very like—in fact—an old friend, or relative.'

'Oh! Mr Goodman have told me all about it, sir; and I am sure I hope it may be so; for though they have every care taken of them here, yet of course it isn't like home as you may say, and its hardly to be expected as it should be.'

'No, no, of course; but my business is, I have seen an old sailor this morning—a Mr Swain, who knew Jane Ellis before she came to this asylum, and he says she wore a second ring above her wedding ring when she came here, and I thought

if I could see that I might perhaps recognize it as —as——'

'In course, sir; and so you shall see it, for I've got it safe and sound. You see when I first came here, Janie, she used to wear it, but she got to give it away to every stranger that came into the place, and that made so much confusion and quarrelling I was forced to take it from her, though it's altogether against my rules to deprive them of anything. Mary,' she continued to one of the assistant nurses, 'go to my room, and bring me the workbox that stands on my chest of drawers. Now, look sharp; do!'

The younger woman returned almost immediately, and the ring was placed in Laurence's hands.

He gazed at it with swimming eyes. Not only had it 'A.E.I.' inlaid on it in blue enamel, but inside the golden circle was scratched (he had scratched the letters himself with the point of a pair of scissors) 'D. from L.'

'Is that the ring, sir?' demanded the matron, inquisitively.

'It is the ring!' he answered slowly. He threw it back into the work-box, and walking up to the mad girl with the deliberate determination of one walking to his death, pushed back the hair from her forehead. There was the blue mark which she had borne from childhood.

'Margarita!' he exclaimed, passionately. 'Do not you remember me?'

She stared up into his face vacantly.

'Hush!' she said in a prolonged whisper, 'it is asleep!' and commenced to rock her bundle of rags to and fro again.

He didn't know what to think, to say, or to do. He had a wild impulse to clasp her in his arms and weep over her, but he knew he was surrounded by strangers, and that even though the grave had yielded up its dead, he must command himself. Besides, an awful fear had seized him, a trembling horror that made him feel as

though he must run away at once, and never again re-view that place of torment.

What he did do was to draw himself up to his full height and turn a face, blanched with pain, upon the matron.

'I shall come again. You will hear from me again,' he muttered in an indistinct manner, and made the best of his way outside. When he arrived there he looked around and tried to consider what he should do next.

There was but one course open to him.

To go home and tell it all to Margarita!

CHAPTER XIX.

HOME WITH THE NEWS.

AS soon as he had made up his mind to return home he did so with all speed, and the early part of the afternoon found him standing before his own door. The servant who opened it stared in silent surprise at the haggard appearance which his master presented; for want of rest and food, combined with the shock he had received, had added ten years in one night to the life of Laurence Fane.

He staggered blindly into the hall, and groped his way towards the library. Instinct told him that Margarita would be waiting for him there. He was not mistaken. At his approach she rose

from her seat beside the fire and advanced to meet him.

'My Laurence!' she cried tenderly, as she caught sight of his altered demeanour, and stretched out her arms towards him. He fell into them, almost as helpless as a child. Weary in mind and body—torn asunder by the conflict of his feelings, the wretched man had yet power to acknowledge that *here* was his home—his peace—his resting-place, and he came to it as naturally as the tired infant seeks its mother's breast.

Margarita drew him to her closely. He burst into tears.

'My dearest! what is the matter?' she said, in a tone of alarm.

'*Matter!* If you but knew. Forgive me, Margarita, for this weakness; but you will, when I have explained all. Yet how to tell you?'

'You need not, Laurence,' said the sweet solemn voice above his stricken head. '*I know it already.*'

'You know that—that—She——'

'That *She* lives! Yes, Laurence, I know it, and I live too—live—because I know your grief at this fatal error will be greater than my own—your burden heavier to bear. Oh, my beloved, during these sad hours of separation I have been thinking it all over, and praying for light to be granted us upon the subject, and I can see already that it might have been still worse, and thank God that you and I are innocent of blame.'

'Margarita, how long have you known it?'

'Not twelve hours. At first sight it was only the look—the expression, that caught my eye and woke a sorrowful remembrance. Yesterday I found further evidence in the marks about her person, but it was not till your prolonged and inexplicable absence told me that *you* too must have seen and recognized her, that I felt convinced. God gave me the conviction to make the shock of this meeting less terrible, that it was *she*, our poor darling, whom we mourned as

dead, that I had seen and spoken with. But oh, Laurence, what a fearful situation in which to find her. How terribly sad to see her as she is! What is the cause of it all? How did it come about?'

He groaned, and could not answer.

'Do not be afraid to tell me, dearest. It is God's will, and I can bear anything which comes from Him. It is our lost Daisy, is it not? Our pretty, lively darling, changed to this sad wreck, with silvered hair. But how did she get there? Why did they tell you she was dead?'

He drew her head down close to his own, and in broken, whispered sentences, told her everything that had been told to him, how he had convinced himself that from his poor wife having lost her senses, her person had been confounded with that of the pauper, Jane Ellis, and transferred to the lunatic asylum in her name. 'Had this happened but long ago,' he ended brokenly. 'Could I have received her when the missing

boat came in, however wrecked in mind and body, how thankfully would I have nursed her back to health and strength again, or cherished her hopelessly, until the end, but *now*—what can I do?—What can I do?'

'There is but *one* thing to do, dear Laurence. Though I can well believe she no more appears like your sweet, blooming Daisy to you, yet she *is* Daisy, remember, and being so, but one path is open to you.'

'And what is that, Margarita?'

'To have her home. To bring her here to her own rightful home, from which she has been so long debarred, and see what kindness, and comfort, and old memories may not, with Heaven's blessing, do for her.'

'That is like yourself, my Margarita,' he said, excitedly. 'I knew you would step in, like one of God's angels, to my relief, and point out the very thing that is most just and right. But you must think of yourself too, my darling! How will

you be able to stand it? Will not the constant sight of the poor child's melancholy, or the sound of her ravings, be likely to produce some effect upon you?'

'*Laurence!*'

'Ah! I know what you would say; that you loved her from the beginning and you shall love her to the end; and I know, too, of all the sacrifice your heart is capable. But I cannot have your mental or physical health disturbed. Think how inexpressibly dear—how precious—you are to me, and that nothing in life can compensate for that which should injure you.'

'Oh, Laurence, stop! in mercy, stop!' she said imploringly.

'And yet, when I come to think of it,' he went on, without heeding her entreaty, 'I don't believe God would ever permit your work of charity to hurt you. If there is any chance of cure for her it would be beneath your care. How she loved you. How she looked up to—almost

worshipped you! My poor, wounded dove! My faded blossom! If our united affection can restore you to yourself, you shall be restored.'

'Laurence! you are *killing* me!' cried Margarita, in a voice of agony.

'Are you jealous even of my pity, love?' he answered, tenderly.

'Yes! I am! God forgive me! I shall be jealous even of your presence when I no longer share it.'

'*No longer share it,*' he said hastily; 'Margarita, what do you mean?'

'That I must leave you, Laurence! Haven't you seen it? Haven't you guessed it from the beginning? That now *she* has come, this is no place for me.'

'Who *dares* to say so? No place for you! You, who are my wife—my everything.'

'I am *not*—your wife—' she answered in a tone of dull despair.

Laurence Fane started to his feet. A light

burst on him. Her words were true. He had reached the climax of his agony.

Strange to say, in all the anxiety and confusion through which he had lately passed, *this* idea had never presented itself to his mind's eye. He had felt bitterly the recovery of poor Daisy in so lamentable a condition—he had foreseen a complication of difficulties in rendering her future life happy and comfortable—and he had dreaded breaking the news to Margarita that her cousin was still alive—but it had never struck him that the wrong that they had mutually but innocently done her would have to be expiated by the utter annihilation of anything like love or happiness for both of them. But now he saw it all. The first wife's home-coming—the second wife's outgoing—the darkened, desolate hearth for him—and for Margarita a future of obloquy and shame.

'*It shall not be,*' he exclaimed loudly. 'In the sight of God and man you are my wife, Margarita, and I cannot part with you. I should die

if you were to leave me. Forgive me—forgive me, dearest,' he continued, as he threw himself down by her side and covered her with caresses—'for the position I have unintentionally placed you in, but don't talk of leaving me now, or you will drive me to despair.'

'But Daisy,' she murmured, through her choking sobs.

'We will provide for her, Margarita. We will see that she has every comfort. We will spend our lives in trying to brighten her existence. But to resign our own happiness will not be to add to hers. She knows nothing, poor thing—she remembers nothing; she will not thank us for the sacrifice.'

'Oh, Laurence, do not tempt me. You do not know how weak I am. How the devil has been fighting with me all night long.'

'I do not tempt you, love. I only tell you the plain truth. I will take the poor child away and put her under some kind person's care in the

country, and no one will be the wiser, Margarita. She can still pass under the name of Jane Ellis. Who will guess the truth?'

'*Ourselves*,' said Margarita, solemnly, '*and God*. Oh, Laurence, do you think we could do this and live as we have done, in peace and comfort? Our happy home would be transformed into a place of torment, where, partners in guilt, we might even come from suspecting to hating one another.'

'How could that ever be? Darling, this misery is making you beside yourself. But if our mutual happiness is of so little consequence, think of our child.'

Margarita shuddered and closed her eyes.

'She is not only our child,' she said at length, 'she is God's child too. He knew all the circumstances of our case, and yet He sent her. It must have been for some wise purpose of His own. No! Laurence, the thought of our child does not shake me. Her Father in heaven will look after her.'

'You seem to find it easy,' said Laurence, mournfully.

'Oh, no! Oh, no! if you only knew, if you could only see,' she commenced sobbing, and then, overwhelmed by her own thoughts, she went on passionately, 'Laurence! Laurence! my own, my love, my husband! Oh, God! My heart will break! My heart will break!'

* * * * *

So they wept, those two wounded hearts, together. Let the God who sent the tears alone be witness to them.

END OF VOL. II.

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.